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(Critical) Psychology as Politics by Other Means



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Editorial

More than a century after its establishment, psychology has burgeoned into a vast industry that produces and disseminates knowledge, interventions, and social outcomes. This industry often frames its practices as neutral technologies aimed at helping and improving individuals and society. However, this purported neutrality obscures the political nature of these practices, masking their role in social and societal control. The current issue of the *Annual Review of Critical Psychology* (ARCP) delves into the intricate relationship between psychology and politics, emphasizing that human action and agency are inherently political.

The connection between psychology and politics is multifaceted, encompassing areas such as psychology *and* politics, psychology *in* politics, political psychology, and politics *in* psychology. Despite this breadth, the political character of human action is frequently treated as an optional aspect, dependent on the individual psychologist's ethical orientation. This approach fails to acknowledge that the political dimension of human action resists confinement to a specialized subdiscipline like political psychology. The term 'political psychology' misleadingly implies the existence of an 'a-political psychology,' a notion that is fundamentally flawed.

Human action is inherently political due to its social contextualization. It constitutes and is constituted by the social fabric, extending outwards through activities like planning, organizing, caring, prevention, and foresight. The political nature of human action is a fundamental aspect of every human endeavour, including psychological and academic work. Agency involves not just executing given tasks but also formulating questions and identifying phenomena as problematic, thus demanding corrective action. This anticipative and creative dimension of agency underscores that human action maintains and pioneers alternative social relations, making it perpetually political.

In recognizing the pre-figurative qualities and dimensions of human action, (critical) psychology emerges as inherently political. It becomes clear that (critical) psychology operates as politics by other means. This perspective is central to the current issue, which explores psychology as politics by other

means, challenging the view that the political aspect of human agency is merely an add-on to psychological theories or practices.

This issue engages with the diverse and profound relationship between psychology and politics, examining the political assumptions embedded in our psychological theories and practices, the emergence of distinct subjectivities within psychological theory and practice, and the explicit or tacit interests of these subjects. Through this exploration, we aim to foster a deeper understanding of how psychology can serve as a powerful tool for political action and social change.

The contributions

There are over 50 articles in this issue. They cover a wide range of topics and are grouped into six broad areas: Methodology and Epistemology; Subjectivities and Subject Formation; Social Practices of Psychology; Racism and Nationalism; Gender, Women and Critical Feminisms; and Struggles, Visions and Future Possibilities.

The authors of this issue are from a variety of places on the globe, including Brazil Germany, Greece, Austria, South Africa, Turkey, Denmark, the USA, the UK, Botswana, Chile, Iran, Mexico, and Norway. Additionally, some articles focus on the Russia-Ukraine war or the US-Vietnam war, adding further geographic diversity.

The issue includes articles that are primarily theoretical or conceptual in nature, use empirical or primary data, or are reflective and/or critical commentaries. While all the articles straddle theoretical issues, conceptual critiques, reflective commentaries, and draw upon some data from existing research projects, these broad classifications give us a sense of the methodological slant of this collection. Where empirical studies are reported, critical discourse analysis, qualitative interviews, or ethnographies are the preferred modes.

Overall, all articles speak to the broad failure of mainstream psychologies, critiquing and troubling the status quo, while also offering alternative and nuanced visions and manifestos for future possibilities of a politicised psychology from a wide range of vantage points.

Methodology and Epistemology

Epistemological and methodological problems of qualitative research in psychology and mental health: Gonzalez Rey's contribution¹

Daniel Magalhães Goulart

Abstract

This paper aims to discuss epistemological and methodological problems within qualitative research in the fields of psychology and mental health. It presents González Rey's Qualitative Epistemology and Constructive-Interpretative Methodology as a heuristically valuable alternative in face of such problems. In this sense, it is not a discussion that focuses solely on criticism regarding the dominant perspectives, but one that points to the possibility of generating new models that advance in consistent investigative courses, with multiple implications for practice as well. The chapter begins with the discussion of key epistemological problems that have marked the history of psychology and mental health, with emphasis on instrumentalism, which culminated in the devitalisation of research and the neglect of emerging qualitative aspects in these fields. Subsequently, alternatives in qualitative research in these fields are discussed, in order to highlight how they were proposals that innovated mostly from a methodological standpoint, but were epistemologically conservative and not very reflective. Finally, in the face of the discussed limitations, González Rey's thought platform is presented as a possibility to advance. This framework articulates, as a unit, the theory of subjectivity, Qualitative Epistemology and Constructive-Interpretative Methodology. It is based on the understanding that scientific knowledge is never a final product, but a production of intelligibility that has the researcher's creative thinking at its core.

Keywords

Qualitative research, mental health, subjectivity, epistemology

¹ This article is linked to the research project "Subjectivity, education and health: subjective development in focus," which is supported by the Brazilian National Council for Scientific and Technological Development (CNPq), through Productivity Grant 2.

Epistemological problems in Psychology and Mental Health

The fields of psychology and mental health² have historically been marked by neglect regarding their own epistemological issues and by the eminently instrumental use of quantification, which reveals a dominant a-theoretical orientation that is present to this day. If this condition is based, on the one hand, on the predilection of positivism as the support basis for methodological research proposals, it is, on the other, also based on a lack of knowledge about the critiques and advances made within these fields with respect to instrumentalism and the reification of quantification. This scenario led to the intense neglect of the historical, cultural, political, subjective and philosophical aspects that are inseparable from the very development of these areas (González Rey and Mitjans Martínez, 2017; Goulart, 2019; Goulart and González Rey, 2020).

As González Rey (2013) argues, the dissociation between the individual sciences and the field of philosophy, which began in the second half of the eighteenth century, culminated in a technocratic perspective, which created the foundations for its own legitimacy and success. In regards to psychology, such an approach has led to a utilitarian and instrumentalist orientation in both research and professional practice. This explains, partially, the emphasis on psychological testing, which enhances the illusion of neutral, accurate, predictive knowledge with broad possibilities for generalization (González Rey, 2019a). The author also points to a striking feature that characterizes psychology and ends up intensifying these processes: the concern with the a-critical importation of instruments and models from other sciences to the detriment of the development of theoretical, epistemological and methodological systems that consider the qualitative specificity of psychological issues (González Rey, 2019b). Lacking a clear representation of its own field, psychology has become an allegedly positivist empirical science, ignoring several interesting aspects of A. Comte's and E. Durkheim's philosophy.

In the mental health field, such a technocratic perspective unfolded into a not only rigid but also fragile demarcation between the normal and the abnormal. Based on an individualist and organicist perspective, this process ended up generating practices, institutions and knowledge based upon the objectification of the other, which has as its clearest expression in the proliferation of mental hospitals in the nineteenth century and the first half of the twentieth century (Kangoulham, 2004; Basaglia, 1985; Goffman, 1974).

Even though historically, and still in the first half of the twentieth century, there have been critical contributions in the face of this technocratic perspective, such as Jaspers' phenomenological psychopathology (Jaspers, 2000), it is a fact that the dominant logic was shaped into a symptomatic-descriptive model aimed to identify the "mental illness." This rigid demarcation, as Foucault (1975) argues, is related to the comprehension of mental illness as something of the essence; that is, as a specific entity expressed by the symptoms that manifest it, but somewhat independent of them. On the other hand, alongside this essence

² The use of the term "mental health" in this paper refers rather to a field conventionally named as such, rather than to a concept qualitatively defined as such.

prejudice, there is a naturalistic premise that ends up considering mental illness as a kind of botany. According to the author,

“(...) the supposed unity in each nosographic group behind the symptom’s polymorphism would be like the unity of a species defined by its permanent characteristics and diversified into subgroups: thus, early dementia is a species characterized by the last forms of its natural evolution, and which may have the hebephrenic, catatonic and paranoid variants” (Foucault, 1975, p. 8).

Thus, the so-called “mental illness” comes to be seen as a reality in itself, defined by a set of eminently behavioral criteria and dissociated from the singular vital plot that generates it and upon which it unfolds.

This process is not only a part of the *history* of mental health, but still represents dominant sectors in the field today, notably supported by the biomedical model (Goulart, 2017a). Such a model substantiated the already widely questioned Cartesian ideology, whose certainty of scientific knowledge has unfolded into a mechanistic understanding of organic function (Canguilhem, 2004). Based on this model, prevailing practices across the field are based on the machine metaphor as an explanatory resource for deviations from normality, conceived as diseases. In fact, as Camargo Jr (2007) explains, practice in this perspective focuses on the identification and treatment of diseases, so that everything else, including the individual who holds the disease, is marginalized. Thus, constitutive aspects of human subjectivity, such as social, cultural and historical dynamics, are excluded from this horizon (Goulart and González Rey, 2019; Goulart, 2022).

Scientific knowledge linked to the developments of the biomedical model in mental health, as well as in psychology, is supported by the justification of being “evidence-based.” In this process, the so-called “evidence-based science” is often assumed as a synonym for validity and legitimacy, as if this title exempts it from discussing its assumptions, such as what evidence means and who ultimately decides on it (McMullen, 2012, McMullen and Sigurdson, 2013). A problematic development of this logic in the field of mental health, as Ingleby (2014) argues, is that such evidence-based science seems to mask a research agenda dominated by the pharmaceutical industry, which ultimately overestimates medical treatments. Therefore, one comes to a pernicious paradox that seems to have been the dark side of all large-scale psychiatric interventions in the world, as discussed by Foucault (1977, 2006): The more treatment is offered, the more disease is produced.

Effectively, the dominant perspectives in psychology and mental health coincide, therefore, in the elimination of the quality of the lived experience as a unit of analysis, as well as in the neglect of theoretical constructions to represent and deal with the phenomena with which they deal in a differentiated manner (González Rey, 2017b; Goulart, 2019). From a methodological point of view, these perspectives avoid the challenge of seeking more qualified ways to build courses of dialogue with their correspondents and pay little attention to the craft of interpretative construction inherent to research (González Rey and Mitjans Martínez, 2019). Variations and singularities, when not ignored, are considered

as miscalculations, while the researcher's ideas are seen as unwanted contamination. In short, in the modern pursuit of instrumentalizing the scientific exercise, relations become instrumentalized themselves. As argued by Japiassu (1982), the sciences that emphasize human matters become a paradoxically impossible undertaking, marked by the pursuit of studying human processes, while excluding the human side of them.

The method came to be conceived as a reality in itself and as independent from the qualitative and singular specificities of the studied object. It was severed from the philosophical discussions that support it, promoting a dissociation between method, epistemology and theory (Goulart and Patiño Torres, 2021; Patiño Torres and Goulart, 2016, 2020). Statistics became the basis upon which the claims of knowledge were validated (Japiassu, 1982). In the field of psychology, this process led to instrumentalism, in a scenario that came to be known by its critics as “methodological fetishism” (Koch, 1999) and as “methodolatry” (Danzinger, 1990). It is noteworthy, as González Rey and Mitjáns Martínez (2017) point out, that psychology operated an uncritical importation of the premises of the biological and exact sciences, at a time when, in the face of the problems of this dominant model, these sciences were already advancing epistemological and theoretical alternatives in the first half of the twentieth century, such as quantum mechanics with authors W. Heisenberg and M. Plank.

In this context, González Rey (2005) argues that there is a need for epistemological revitalization in scientific research, positing,

The revitalization of the epistemological is, therefore, a necessity in view of the attempt to monopolize the scientific based upon the relation between data and the validity and reliability of the instruments that produce them. This instrumentalism corrupted the purpose of science and led to the reification of the empirical, causing profound deformations when using theory. For this reason, to speak of qualitative methodology implies a theoretical-epistemological debate, without which it is impossible to overcome the instrumental cult derived from the hypertrophy that considers instruments direct courses of producing results in research (González Rey, 2005, p. 3).

Epistemological problems in the fields of psychology and mental health could thus be synthesized as:

1. A symptomatic-descriptive model aimed to identify “mental illnesses”;
2. A biomedical model, represented by the metaphor of a machine logic in understanding practices within the mental health field;
3. A positivist model in the construction of scientific knowledge, based on so-called “evidences,” which unfolded methodological approaches considered as a reality in itself, independently of the specific qualities of what is studied. This process led to a dissociation between theory, epistemology and method.

Next, I present a reflection on qualitative research, mainly in the field of psychology, emphasizing some epistemological alternatives in the face of the modern hegemonic perspective, as well as limitations historically present in the

field. This discussion gives rise to González Rey's proposal for Qualitative Epistemology and Constructive-Interpretative Methodology (González Rey, 1997, 2005, 2019a) as a possibility for the opening of new epistemological and methodological avenues with heuristic value in the psychology and mental health fields.

Qualitative research in Psychology: Innovations, contradictions and challenges

Throughout the twentieth century, psychology was characterized by a plurality of sources that favored the emergence of different theories and methodologies (González Rey, 2019c). According to González Rey and Mitjáns Martínez (2017), in addition to the innovations undertaken by psychoanalysis and Vygotsky, the work of K. Lewin and his group should be highlighted in the field of qualitative research in psychology. These authors not only explicitly took the first steps in qualitative field research, but also approached the qualitative as a theoretical problem by articulating it to the study of human motivation and personality.

A member of K. Lewin's group, T. Dembo, said: "(...) personal experience is more closely and directly linked not only to the question of research, but also to one's feelings and values; therefore, I believe, it may be more potent in its relation to qualitative questions" (Dembo, 1993, p. 25). In this quote, the author expresses something that will mark her work: the advance in methodological reflections is closely related to the developing theoretical model – something seen rarely in the first half of the twentieth century.

González Rey and Mitjáns Martínez (2017) also explain that, in the 1960s, a potent critique of hegemonic positivism was produced in American psychology, whose protagonist was S. Koch, as well as a group of humanistic authors, whose work represented a rupture with the sacralization of instruments, description and quantification. As part of the latter group, G. Allport said:

Two types of approaches predominate in Anglo-American psychology. We refer to the stimulus-response and statistical methods. The stimulus-response unit considered by psychology is habit, the statistical unit is fact. Both suffer from noteworthy limitations, the most important being their distancing from the structure of human life as ordinarily observed (Allport, 1967, p. 394).

G. Allport points out precisely that favoring rigor *a priori* over the quality of the studied process is a key weakness of instrumentalism. From this point of view, the relationship between research and the everyday "structure of human life" is lost, which, ultimately, is what underpins research on human processes.

However, as González Rey (2019a) explains, during the boom of qualitative research in psychology in the 1980s and 1990s, psychologists such as Bogdan and Biklen (1982) and Glasser and Strauss (1967) again engaged in the relatively a-critical importation of social science references, rather than drawing on the

important antecedents of qualitative research in psychology itself. Despite being an important methodological step, as the process was based on the critique of dominant quantitative research, it was carried out without epistemological discussions and ontological definitions concerning the very phenomena that required new methodologies to be studied.

According to González Rey (2019a), that time was marked by a search for validation criteria in phenomenology. However, unlike the K. Lewin group and other Gestalt authors, many researchers who relied on phenomenology were characterized by a lack of further deepening of this broad and heterogeneous philosophical perspective³, which often led to the arbitrary use of conceptual labels attributed to the alleged “empirical data.” This inability of psychologists to operate with the complexity of philosophical models can be seen as the expression of an educational training characterized by an eminently positivist and naturalistic view of the discipline (Mitjáns Martínez and González Rey, 2019). It is not possible to use philosophy as a finished product, ready to be applied directly to any field of science while imposing itself *a priori* on intellectual creation (González Rey, 2019c). This led to the construction of a qualitatively instrumental and epistemologically positivist hybrid, whose inductive-descriptive orientation became the main resource for the production of knowledge (González Rey and Mitjáns Martínez, 2017). The philosophical basis of this process was Husserl's interest in attaining “things as they are,” which ignored the final moment of his work, as well as alternative standpoints of other phenomenological authors such as Heidegger and Merleau-Ponty. González Rey (2019a) discusses works in the psychology field that go in this direction, such as that of A. Giorgi, who says: “Despite all the apparent difficulties, it is stated that they [phenomena] can be grasped as they are actually experienced. And to capture them in this way is to begin to understand them objectively or scientifically” (Giorgi, 1995, p. 39). From this brief quote, it is possible to see how, in its alleged search to learn the studied phenomenon as it is “actually” experienced by the individual, this line of thought in psychology ends up maintaining the scientific ideal based on objectivity.

For González Rey and Mitjáns Martínez (2017), this phenomenological perspective expresses the following main limitations:

1. To consider that the lived experience comes down to a reality limited to the very events that defined it, which, in turn, are subject to signification by the individual such as they happened;
2. In this case, the researcher is a data collector, in such a way that his/her ideas and conjectures do not appear as a constituent part of his analysis, which ends up being limited to the intentional explicit report of the participants;
3. The validity of the analysis is a process external to the quality of the researcher's own construction;
4. There is a lack of a methodological proposal capable of keeping track of the different forms of dialogue.

³ Merleau-Ponty himself wondered about this: “What is phenomenology? It seems strange that this question still needs to be asked half a century after Husserl's early work. The fact is that this question remains unanswered by any means” (Merleau-Ponty, 1964, p. VII)

From this perspective, although under the title of qualitative research, the emphasis remained on instrumental and technical dimensions, without sufficient problematization and consistent constructions of what a qualitative approach means that is pertinent to the ontological specificity of the studied phenomena (Goulart and Patiño Torres, 2021). An expression of this limitation is the enthusiastic spread of the so-called Quali-Quantitative Research, which is often problematic, since it simplifies the complexity of such an approach to a technical addition of research strategies without due attention to the divergence between the epistemological bases that support them, respectively (Patiño Torres and Goulart, 2016, 2020). In this regard, Turato states:

Note that a mix between quantitative and qualitative methods is not possible when there is a clear question. Let it be clear that while we say that quantity and quality are inseparable and interdependent, we must say that 'quantitative-qualitative' separation exists epistemologically, because they are devoted to *answering different questions*, albeit raised regarding the same object (Turato, p. 2004, p. 23, emphasis added).

Another historically problematic development of qualitative research that prioritizes technique over in-depth epistemological, ontological and theoretical discussions is the dissociation between so-called “data collection” and “data analysis,” as if the researcher were, in fact, a collector of information ready and ripe to be consumed, and not an individual immersed in complex relationships, which are crossed by subjective and cultural processes. This separation is an expression of the infamous separation between theory and method, as if such processes maintain an artificial externality relation to each other. As stated by González Rey (2014a), in this logic, the theory, supposedly “applied” to empirical material, is understood through isolated and descriptive concepts, in order to do without the theoretical construction in itself. The empirical, in turn, is understood at the same time as external to the researcher himself and as *a priori* in relation to the knowledge produced. As I argue in another paper, one loses sight of

(...) the strength of an alternative methodological representation: the recognition of the status of ideas. As an information collector, data systematizer and applier of *a priori* concepts, the qualitative researcher remains averse and fearful of the process that underlies his craft: thinking (Goulart, 2018, pp. 2-3).

Based on the contributions of various authors in the field, such as F. González Rey, S. Koch and K. Danzinger, qualitative research in psychology, eager to distance itself from the hegemonic quantitative perspectives, ended up infiltrated by modern science historical problems, amongst which stand out the hegemony of the empirical, the theoretical apriorism, the emphasis on supposedly atheoretical descriptions and the researcher's neutrality (Patiño Torres and Goulart, 2016). In other words:

From this perspective, the sieves of legitimacy of the dominant modern epistemology, namely objectivity, precision and validity, end up being ghosts of the qualitative proposals, which, by not dealing directly with the epistemological problems they carry, remain supported by what they criticize (Goulart, 2018, p. 3).

From the 1990s onwards, different alternatives in the qualitative research field in psychology and mental health have been developed and gained strength. Some had their origins in previous decades, originally came from other fields, such as action research, cartography, and discourse analysis, and maintained their interdisciplinary traditions. In psychology, González Rey and Mitjáns Martínez (2017) argue that during that decade hermeneutics was the most used perspective to legitimize the use of interpretation in research, although without developing the epistemological consequences for knowledge production specifically in psychology. In fact, hermeneutics, in its critique of epistemology and ontology, was defined as the comprehension “of the way of being of this being that exists only in understanding (Ricoeur, 2008, p. 37).” In general, hermeneutics has set the text as its object in such a way that all human processes are read as text. However, it has avoided studying the individual as the text’s author (González Rey and Mitjáns Martínez, 2017). From these contributions, several critical approaches⁴ began to emphasize, within psychology, mental health and the social sciences, among them discourse, language, communication, the dialogical self, deconstruction, social construction, and dialogical realities. Such approaches gradually separate themselves from psychology itself and from the notion of the psyche as an individual and natural entity (Harré, 1995; Parker, 2014).

Despite the theoretical, epistemological and methodological value that these critical approaches had for promoting the understanding of human processes as inseparable from social symbolic constructions, many of them ended up neglecting the individual as an active dimension of such constructions (González Rey, 2019d). In this process, dimensions that were historically related to the individual were directly associated with metaphysics and romanticism without considering the possibility of approaching them through other theoretical courses. Therefore, all the richness of subjectivity -including emotional processes, imagination and human motivation- was left out of such readings of social life as they were considered as epiphenomena of hegemonic discourses, thus ignoring the individual’s creative capacity and agency (González Rey, 2019d). In the field of mental health, these critical approaches have frequently led to a process of sociologization. On the one hand, this process of sociologization considered social, political, cultural and relational issues related to different expressions of distress; on the other hand, it ended up ignoring how these social, political, cultural and relational issues are singularly configured in an individual experience of suffering and how this individual is not only a victim

⁴ Critical approaches are understood in this paper as approaches that define themselves as such. They have been considered as “(t)heoretical trends that (...) have emerged as politically engaged and as critical investigations of societal processes and institutions, focusing on such topics as discrimination and exclusion in terms of gender, race and class and the exercise of power through ideological means” (Fleer et al., 2020, p. 3).

of a broader process, but may also be an agent or a subject of his/her own experience.

Theory of Subjectivity and critical mental health

From the shortcomings left by different critical approaches that were mainly based on hermeneutics, which is at the same time theoretical, epistemological and methodological, González Rey advances his thought platform by articulating Theory of Subjectivity, Qualitative Epistemology and Constructive-Interpretative Methodology (1997, 2002, 2005, 2017, 2019a, 2019b; González Rey and Mitjans Martínez, 2017, 2019)⁵. The founding work that articulates Theory of Subjectivity, Qualitative Epistemology and Constructive-Interpretative Methodology is *Epistemología Cualitativa y Subjetividad* (González Rey, 1997). In this book, González Rey presents a new definition for subjectivity, as culturally and historically constituted, far from the universal essentialist remnants associated with the Cartesian definition. From this perspective, subjectivity is not reduced to language, speech or text, but articulates symbolic and emotional processes in a new ontology. Only through a symbolic-emotional unit, which defines subjective production, do social productions become motives for human action (González Rey, 2014b). In this perspective, as stated by González Rey and Mitjans Martínez (2017, p. 23): “language does not hang over human beings; it is a human production that carries all the subjective character of its configuration and of the living fabric of relationships with others.” This perspective on subjectivity incorporates the notion that individual and social dimensions, as stances that share a subjective character, can be integrated in a contradictory manner that does not reduce one dimension to another (González Rey and Mitjans Martínez, 2019). In this sense, subjectivity can be understood as a critical theoretical tool as it allows advancing upon an intelligibility path that explains singular individual and social production in a manner inseparable from broader social dynamics.

The symbolic-emotional unit, represented by the concept of subjective sense, surpasses historical intrapsychic and individual reductionism, which has characterized the concept of subjectivity in psychology, philosophy and other social sciences (González Rey, 2017). Furthermore, it transcends the sociologization of human processes, which has prevailed in many critical approaches in both psychology and mental health. In addition to these more elementary symbolic-emotional units, which are named ‘subjective senses,’ subjectivity is constituted by self-regulating and self-generating organizations with relative stability, represented by the concept of subjective configurations.

⁵ This approach emerges in the psychology field, but also expresses its value in different research lines today, such as in the field of education (Mitjans Martínez and González Rey, 2017; Rossato, 2009; Madeira Coelho and Tacca, 2019), psychotherapy (González Rey, 2007, 2012; Mori, 2012; Mori and Goulart, 2019), human health (Costa, 2016; Costa and Goulart, 2015; González Rey, 2011, 2015; Goulart, 2021; Mori, 2009; Silva, 2016) and, more specifically, mental health (Goulart, 2013, 2015, 2017b; 2019a, 2019b; Goulart and González Rey, 2016, 2019, 2020).

These concepts have profound implications for the field of mental health, as they allow a new understanding of its processes.

Critical of the notion of naturalized, universal, and *a priori* taxonomies of “mental illnesses,” González Rey (2011) defined mental disorder as the emergence of a type of subjective configuration that generates distress and “prevents the individual from producing alternative subjective senses that could allow him/her new options for life before the rituals perpetuated by this configuration” (González Rey, 2011, pp. 21-22). This definition refers to the unique life plot in which this subjective configuration emerges. The concept of subjective configuration does not express any pre-determined content, but a representation of the subjective organization that only comes to life as it is used as a tool for theoretical construction in singular cases.

Due to the narrow and individualistic way in which the concept of mental disorder has historically been conceived in a dominant way in other perspectives and considering that subjectivity cannot be reduced to the “mental,” I have opted for the term ‘subjective suffering’ (Goulart, 2023; Goulart and Faria, 2023). Subjective suffering does not refer specifically to everyday tensions, contradictions and conflicts, which, in some way, are experienced by all individuals to some degree, but to a dominant subjective configuration that generates distress for the individual, such as in the definition of mental disorder by González Rey (2011). It culminates in the weakening of the individual’s subjective resources⁶ and reduces their possibilities for action, reflection and positioning in different areas of life. Understanding a specific situation of subjective suffering demands an approach to the singularity of the subjective production of the other – something very different from what has been predominantly practiced in the field of mental health.

Professional practices based on the Theory of Subjectivity are oriented towards understanding subjective suffering as a basis for developing dialogical strategies aimed at overcoming it and favoring subjective development⁷. Therefore, dialogue is central to this perspective (González Rey; Mitjans Martínez, 2019; Goulart, 2023). Dialogue is not reduced to its discursive dimension, nor does it necessarily represent any sort of communication. It implies a subjective mobilization in an interrelational process, which is, simultaneously, the basis for its construction and the main outcome of its process. Dialogue can involve provocations, moments of tension and questions that open up new fields of reflection, unfolding in processes beyond the concrete moment of dialogue. It implies an affective bond that does not nullify the differences between its actors, configuring itself as a powerful resource to simultaneously consider and mobilize others to generate paths of subjective development from their own resources.

⁶ The notion of subjective resources is understood “as a functional dimension of a subjective configuration, expressed in the expansion of possibilities for action, reflection and positioning in different areas of life” (Goulart; Mitjans Martínez, 2023, p. 46).

⁷ “We consider subjective development to be the development of new subjective resources that allow the individual to make qualitative changes in different areas of life and that generate an increasingly deeper personal involvement in the area in which the subjective configuration of development is organized” (Mitjans Martínez; González Rey, 2017, p. 73).

The construction of dialogue and the opening of paths of subjective development require that the individuals involved in these processes emerge as agents and subjects of the social space of which they are part. González Rey and Mitjáns Martínez (2017) explain that the agent would be the individual or social group that takes an active position, being “situated in the course of events in the current field of their experiences.” (p. 73) In turn, the emergence of the subject implies a further step. It represents an individual or social condition, which expresses the opening of “a proper path of subjectivation, which overcomes the normative social space within which an individual’s experiences happen, exerting creative options in the course of them, which may or may not be expressed in the action” (p. 73).

Based on the Theory of Subjectivity, research and practice are theoretical enterprises, closely linked to each other. They imply a dialogical conception, contrary to the objectification of the other and the instrumentalization of relational systems, attributing strong importance to the condition of individuals and groups to position themselves in an active and authentic way in their different life paths (González Rey; Goulart; Bezerra, 2016). Overcoming an ethics of procedure, one is oriented towards the construction of an ethics of the subject. In the field of mental health, this ethics of the subject implies an inversion of the dominant logic: Instead of the relationship built with the other being based on the institutionalized technical procedure, it is placed in a flexible and singular way in the search to favor the condition of the subject and of the subjective development of the other. Instead of control over the other, it operates with a logic of mobilizing possible changes.

Qualitative Epistemology and Constructive-Interpretative Methodology: New foundations and new challenges for qualitative research

To advance the study of subjective processes, the construction of new epistemological principles that would simultaneously open new methodological options, became pressing. In this sense, as González Rey (2014a) explains, Qualitative Epistemology substantiates the knowledge production as a subjectively configured process, both by the theory that underlies it as by the researcher himself/herself. From this perspective, science figures as a constructive-interpretative process, as it refers to a production of intelligibility, not an attempt to apprehend reality representationally. Closely related to Qualitative Epistemology, Constructive-Interpretative Methodology has been advanced as a methodological approach that proposes a different understanding of instruments, participants, and analysis.

From this perspective, general conclusions attained by using inductive criteria from the analyzed information, as presented in many phenomenological approaches in both psychology and mental health, are avoided. Emphasis is given to the researcher’s interpretative constructs, which are based on indicators. Indicators are meanings attributed by the researcher to pieces of information pertaining from the field experience (González Rey, 1997; González Rey and

Mitjans Martínez, 2019). They are not present in the participant's expression, but in the researcher's interpretative construction in the face of such expression (González Rey, 2005). From the convergence between different indicators, it becomes possible to construct broader meanings regarding the studied phenomenon, which, in this perspective, is defined as hypothesis (González Rey and Mitjans Martínez, 2016, 2019 *ibid.*). The recursive relationship between indicators and hypotheses, added to other reflections that the researcher forges during the constructive-interpretative process, forms the theoretical model concerning the studied problem (González Rey, 2005, 2014a).

This theoretical model expresses the researcher's ideas and constructions that arise in field work and by which the researcher is oriented to participate actively in the course of the fieldwork itself and the new constructions that develop in this process. The theoretical model is a living process that demands further development, the use of new research instruments and the implementation of turns in the course of the dialogue within which all fieldwork is organized (González Rey and Mitjans Martínez, 2017, p. 90).

From this perspective, the method abandons its abstraction and universal standardization in order to become a living dimension, which expresses the researcher's condition to elaborate and organize his own ideas and actions in the research field. In this process, the method has the researcher's thinking activity at its core.

Unlike other epistemological and methodological approaches, this proposal rescues the subject as an epistemological category in the process of knowledge construction (González Rey, 2019a, 2019b). The researcher's thinking activity during the course of research is the basis for generating strategies that seek to qualify the relationships established during the research, which unfold into the dialogue processes shared with the participants. For González Rey (1997, 2005), it is essential to build authentic dialogue processes during the course of research in which people are subjectively engaged and motivated to share lived situations. In effect, the research itself is conceived as a process of dialogical communication. This marks not only differences in the researcher-participant relationship, but also in the research representation itself, which is now conceived as a social space, in which different and unpredictable communication processes emerge spontaneously, placing the researcher and participants in a living relational fabric that may become relevant to the researched topic itself (González Rey and Mitjans Martínez, 2016).

The consideration of research as a dialogical communication process is related to the author's notion of research instruments as creatively generated strategies to favor the expression of participants in the fieldwork process. In the use of the instruments, no criterion of legitimacy external to the relation that constitutes the research is required. A shift is operated from a response epistemology, centered on the "data" collection, to a construction epistemology, which transcends what is explicit, in search of theoretical constructs in tune with the quality of the lived processes (González Rey, 2005).

On the one hand, the theoretical model is supported by a broader theory, in this case, the Theory of Subjectivity, which offers system-articulated concepts to more generally represent subjective processes. On the other hand, the form the theoretical model takes in the study of a specific case depends on the quality of the information generated and the researcher's intellectual and creative capacity in light of his/her object of study. In this sense, there is no abstract and *a priori* logic for the theoretical model.

Theory is the generator of a thought model that offers resources for the researcher's theoretical production, but theory does not provide the meanings that emerge in singular research endeavors. From this perspective, "(...) theoretical concepts represent models to be built in the course of research. When this does not happen, theories risk becoming dogmas and being used as meanings that are imposed upon the research process" (González Rey and Mitjáns Martínez, 2017, p. 37). Theory represents a continually developing process that feeds and is fed by new practice domains (González Rey and Mitjáns Martínez, 2019). In this process, interpretive constructions advance hand in hand with dialogue, in such a way that theory is deeply articulated with the field of research/practice, in which relationships and various forms of communication are constituted. The dichotomy between "data collection" and "data analysis," still present in the fields of psychology and mental health, is overcome, since the empirical process itself is considered a theoretical production.

From this perspective, all scientific research is theoretical because it implies transforming something that happens in the world into a set of human meanings. Such a system of meanings does not represent the world, because there is no linear identity relation between world and meaning. Thus, the theoretical character of research is not defined because it is part of an established theory, but because the research process itself is an act of theoretical production, a process of the production of articulated meanings that develop new forms of intelligibility concerning the studied phenomenon. González Rey explains:

In this epistemological proposal and the methodological proposition that derives from it, theory making is the general objective of knowledge production. Developing theory, however, differs from 'applying' theories - a term that only makes sense in a science that defines itself as empirical. The theories in our proposal can never be applied, because a theory's categories take new forms and generate specific meanings in light of the new demands that all research implies. In this sense, the 'use of theories' always implies 'making theory', representing an active process of the researcher, which permanently assumes his or her author status. (González Rey, 2014a, p. 17, emphasis added)

In fact, the knowledge produced is always partial, since it is historically and subjectively configured; it is not possible to reach definitive conclusions for the topic addressed. The production of knowledge seeks to follow, as best as possible, the tension between organization and procedurality of the studied subjective processes, without trying to exhaust the complexity of such processes.

The partiality and procedurality of scientific research are what allows us to comprehend the notion of theoretical generalization adopted in this perspective.

As already argued, one does not seek to reach conclusions through inductive processes, but to advance in new meanings, promoting different articulations between them, expanding intelligibility courses that did not exist before concerning the studied phenomenon. In this regard, a singular case study can contribute new elements that broaden the knowledge concerning the phenomenon in question. In this sense, singularity acquires epistemological status insofar as it represents not only uniqueness, but a differentiated record of information that takes on meaning in a theoretical model that transcends it (González Rey, 2019a). It is a process of theoretical generalization, which is directed towards the construction of theory-practice units that are oriented to constructing resounding, albeit partial, explanations of the problem studied. Thus, theoretical generalization would consist precisely in the value that such articulations and meanings acquire in the understanding of new situations and events that, before such construction, were unintelligible (González Rey, 2014a).

Therefore, from the Qualitative Epistemology and the Constructive-Interpretative Methodology standpoint, research aims to open new spaces of intelligibility concerning the studied object, which can substantiate new ways of thinking and acting in relation to it (González Rey and Mitjáns Martínez, 2017, 2019). Such spaces of intelligibility, supported by the theoretical models that substantiate them, may be the basis for new and broader constructions, so as to culminate in the genesis of new concepts. Broader theoretical constructions, such as the concept and subjectivity as a symbolic-emotional system, makes way for theoretical visibility, which, due to its scope in terms of intelligibility concerning reality, is defined as new zones of sense (González Rey, 2005).

González Rey (1997, 2003) distances himself from the position held by current authors who claim that there is no reality beyond discourse, as he is more in tune with the conception adopted by French historical epistemology, represented, amongst others, by G. Bachelard (1978), in which all scientific construction is perceived as a way of simultaneously approaching reality and creating new human realities. This does not mean that there is a finished and defined reality to be apprehended by knowledge, but that our theoretical production is permanently tensioned by elements of such reality, which go beyond the processes involved in the genesis of this production. Such a position expresses an alternative to both naive realism and the total dilution of reality in culturally produced linguistic practices, which ultimately denies any ontological dimension apart from discourse. In this regard, the author expresses:

The consideration of a distinct approach to the theoretical discourses in which knowledge expresses itself, and in relation to which knowledge will confront itself permanently, is what we consider to be reality. (...) The empirical moment is not the expression of a 'reality in itself', but the result of the confrontation of the theory with what was studied in the meaning creation produced by the theory (González Rey, 2005, p. 32).

In this regard, theory is understood as a process in permanent confrontation and development based on different ways of dialoguing with reality.

This thought platform expresses its value in the fields of psychology and mental health by offering alternatives to instrumentalist proposals, typical of modern science, and to the lack of epistemological reflections that supported some methodological innovations in qualitative research, which cultivated the induction criterion as the only legitimacy parameter for the production of knowledge. Articulated as a tripod, Theory of Subjectivity, Qualitative Epistemology and Constructive-Interpretative Methodology allow a new and complex understanding of human functioning within culture, with several implications for the field of psychology and mental health.

In summary, this perspective allows:

- An articulation of epistemology, methodology and theory, which emphasizes the subjective dimension of human experience as symbolic-emotional processes and organizations, which express the generative and singular character of individuals and social groups. This allows the construction of a critical perspective without falling into linguistic-discursive reductionism.
- Overcoming instrumentalism and the devitalization of research processes and professional practice that have been developed within the scope of psychology and mental health. This perspective generates alternatives to conservative epistemological perspectives, which ended up reproducing many of the typical limitations of dominant modern science, such as the hegemon of the empirical, the theoretical apriorism, and the researcher's neutrality.
- Overcoming both individualization, which emphasizes individual and universal explanations to the detriment of relationships, society, culture and history, and sociologization, which ends up leading to a conception in which individuals and social groups are echoes of broader social processes, without any generative capacity;
- Advancing an articulated proposal for research and professional practice, in which the researcher/professional and the participant/user have a fundamentally active role in the construction of dialogical processes that allow both to understand subjective suffering in a complex and singular way and to orient practice towards subjective development in different social spaces based on an ethics of the subject.

Surely this is not the only possible alternative to the problems presented in this chapter, but advancing this unity between theory, epistemology, and methodology is a consistent way to move forward.

Executive Summary

This paper discussed epistemological and methodological problems within the fields of psychology and mental health and presented González Rey's Qualitative Epistemology and Constructive-Interpretative Methodology as a heuristic valuable alternative in the face of such problems. Emphasis was given to instrumentalism, which ended up devitalising research and neglecting emerging qualitative aspects in these fields. In fact, the dominant perspectives in mental health and psychology coincided in the elimination of both the quality of the

lived experience as a unit of analysis and of theoretical construction to represent the phenomena with which they deal. In short, variations and singularities were either ignored or considered as miscalculations, while the researcher's ideas were conceived of as unwanted contamination.

Alternatives in qualitative research in these fields were discussed, highlighting their methodological innovation along with their epistemological conservatism. In this sense, eager to distance itself from the dominant quantitative perspectives, some approaches within qualitative research ended up infiltrated by modern science historical problems, such as the hegemon of the empirical, the theoretical apriorism, and the researcher's neutrality.

On the other hand, gradually, different critical approaches within psychology began to emphasize mental health and the social sciences, language, discourse, communication, deconstruction, social construction and so on. In spite of the theoretical, epistemological and methodological value that these approaches had, many of them ended up neglecting the individual as an active stance of social constructions. Consequently, the richness of subjectivity, including imagination, emotional processes, and human motivation, was left out such critical readings of social life and considered as epiphenomena of hegemonic discourses.

Finally, González Rey's thought platform was presented and discussed as an approach to advance in the face of the discussed problems.

This framework articulates the Theory of Subjectivity, Qualitative Epistemology and Constructive-Interpretative Methodology as a unit. This unit substantiates the knowledge construction as a subjectively configured process, both by the researcher themselves and by the theory that underlies it. Science figures as a constructive-interpretative process, as it refers to the production of intelligibility, not an attempt to apprehend reality. This perspective allows a different understanding of subjective suffering, considering it as a complex, and singular subjective configuration, which constantly articulates individual and social experiences. As explained, professional practices based on the Theory of Subjectivity are oriented towards understanding subjective suffering as the basis for developing dialogical strategies aimed at overcoming it and favoring subjective development.

From González Rey's perspective, emphasis is given to the researcher's interpretative constructs, which are based on indicators and hypotheses. The recursive relationship between indicators and hypotheses -along with other researcher's reflections during the constructive-interpretative process- forms the theoretical model concerning the studied problem. Therefore, the method has the researcher's thinking activity at its core, by rescuing the subject as an epistemological category in the process of knowledge construction. Research is understood as a process of dialogical communication. This marks an important difference in the researcher-participant relationship, as well as a different representation of research itself. Research turns out to be conceived of as a social space, in which unpredictable communication processes emerge in a fabric of living relation that may become important to the researched topic itself. In this sense, it is not possible to reach definitive conclusions for a specific topic; rather,

this approach opens new spaces of intelligibility related to its topic, which can be the ground for the construction of new ways of thinking and practice.

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The first psychology laboratories: An intense traffic of micropolitical relations in a neutral space

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Abstract

Since Boring's classic work (*The History of Experimental Psychology*), there has been a strong tendency to consider the establishment of laboratories as historical landmarks, which distinguish the scientific from the pre-scientific past. In this traditional history of psychology the laboratories work as a neutral space for legitimation and demarcation. Few traditional historical studies describe the arising of these laboratories in connection with political aspects. When mentioned, these aspects are correlated with contextual macro-political features, as industrialization or democratization processes. In another perspective, the Studies in Science, Technology and Society (STS) propose a new style of analysis: according to the principle of symmetry, scientific and technological activities are completely intertwined with social practices. We have excellent examples of laboratory studies: the classical researches done by Latour & Woolgar and Knorr-Cetina. If we consider the discussion of laboratories in psychology through different STS perspectives, as Actor-Network Theory (ANT), Political Epistemology (PE) and Strong Program (SP), we can observe different problems and approaches correlating the first laboratories in psychology and micro-political questions. If we take some ANT and PE works we can analyze the political relationship with respondents (participants) via the concepts of Docility and Recalcitrance. We have also the very important concept of Political Ontology proposed by John Law, aiming to understand the political effects of our scientific devices. The PE with Vinciane Despret also points to the history of psychological laboratories with a progressively critical relationship in a political aspect: the history of the naive subject. In the SP perspectives, we have the history of work hierarchies in early psychological laboratories through the work of Martin Kursch. Finally, in some Latin America STS works we have some innovative approaches of these first laboratories in countries as Argentina, Brazil and Chile as Miguel Gallegos' ones. In this article we'll try to explore the connections between traditionally separated practices and historiographies: the first laboratories in these countries were places for school and psychiatric measurements. The objective of this work is not to denounce the laboratory as a simple ideological artifact, but to understand the micro-politically produced world connections there and pay attention to micro-political vectors.

Keywords

Brazilian psychological laboratories, political analysis, STS studies

Since Boring's (1929) classic work, *The History of Experimental Psychology*, there has been a strong tendency to consider the establishment of laboratories as historical landmarks that distinguish scientific psychology from its pre-scientific past. The laboratories work as a neutral space for legitimation and demarcation in this traditional history of psychology. Few traditional historical studies describe how these laboratories arise in connection with contextual politics. When mentioned, these aspects are correlated with contextual macro-political features, such as industrialization or democratization processes. (Cattell, 1928; Kirihaara, 1959; Coon, 1993)

The Studies in Science, Technology, and Society (STS) proposed a new style of analysis based on the principle of symmetry, according to which scientific and technological activities are completely intertwined with social practices. If we consider the discussion of laboratories in psychology through different STS perspectives, such as Actor-Network Theory (ANT), Political Epistemology (PE), and the Strong Program (SP), we can observe different problems and approaches that link the first laboratories in psychology with micro-political questions. If we take some ANT and PE works, we can analyze the political relationship with respondents (participants) via the concepts of Docility and Recalcitrance. Central to our analysis is the concept of Political Ontology, as proposed by John Law (2005), which aims to understand the political effects of our scientific devices. The PE with Vinciane Despret (2004) also points to the micro-political history of psychological laboratories with a progressively critical lens that highlights the history of the naive subject. From the SP perspective, the history of work hierarchies in early psychological laboratories is explored through the work of Martin Kusch (2005).

Finally, some Latin America STS efforts offer some innovative approaches to these first laboratories in countries such as Argentina, Brazil, and Chile. For example, Miguel Gallegos and Hugo Leonardo Silva do such work and the latter additionally explores the connections between traditionally separated practices and historiographies to show how the first laboratories in these countries were places for school and psychiatric measurements. The objective of our work is not to denounce the laboratory as a simple ideological artifact, but to understand the micro-politically produced world connections there and pay attention to micro-political vectors. Highlighting ideological aspects of a laboratory's performance presupposes a separation between the sphere of value and knowledge. In contrast, we assert an inseparable and productive link between the two spheres. Exploring its geographic and historical variation calls into question traditional historiographies that overlap the emergence of psychology with the foundation of laboratories.

The laboratory as a place of scientific demarcation

Why were laboratories used as a historical landmark, able to separate scientific and pre-scientific moments? Perhaps this criterion was offered in the face of the difficulty of establishing a scientific criterion such as those proposed by neo-positivism (ultimate empirical tests); by applied rationalism (projects marked by an ultimate rationality), and by the paradigm thesis (the presence of a normal science).

Within this line, the traditional inquiry among historians, often leading to a kind of Grand Prix history, has been: which was the first laboratory? The local characteristics and modes of operation of these laboratories are of little importance, as there is a general history that is colonially replicated from the metropolis to the most distant corners. In contrast, we can seek to establish the uniqueness of the local production of these laboratories around the world through questions such as: How did these spaces work? Who were the users of these laboratories? How do the hierarchy and the leadership styles work? How important is its functioning? What were its periods of activity? What kind of world and society do they produce? We argue that these questions introduce micro-political dimensions that displace laboratories from their status as epistemological landmarks (with a neutral function) to political entities embedded with social relationships.

These discussions are in connection with the current Laboratory Studies as part of the STS. In this domain, especially inspired by the ANT (Latour and Wooglar, 1979), PE (Despret, 1999, 2004 and 2011), and the SP (Kusch, 2005) we will propose a politically dynamic and symmetric description of the laboratories, considering the actors in connection, the establishment of the winners or the losers, happenings supposedly internal to the laboratories, and supposedly broad social or event external to the laboratories. Let's move on to a brief examination of current STS Laboratory Studies with their main contribution to the subject.

Putting the study of psychological laboratories into perspective: Political Epistemology and Actor-Network Theory

As we proposed in the introduction, this collection of analyses of the first laboratories brings about a space for reflecting on the research methods of these laboratories in terms of their historiographical practices. Drawing on STS, ANT, SP, and PE allows us a microanalysis of the psychology laboratories that discuss the politics of these places and propose alternative ways of describing the history of psychology.

Certain works that try to perform a historical overview of the creation of the STS field focus on laboratory studies as one of the constitutive elements of the field (Lynch, 1993; Law, 2004; Latour, 2008). Classic works by Knorr-Cetina (1981) and Latour and Wooglar (1979) delimited the current STS domain, together with the Edinburgh School's position in favor of the SP in the Sociology

of Scientific Knowledge (Bloor, 1976/1991). The main attribute of these works is the principle of symmetry, according to which the ways in which both the recognized sciences and those knowledges considered doubtful or outdated are studied in the same way, without any privileges given to the first group or any special explanatory entities such as scientific rationality, evidence, revolution or normal science. For the SP, this symmetry operated in the common attribution of social causes (beliefs) present in successful and unsuccessful versions of the great market of knowledge.

Latour and Wooglar's (1979) work is an ethnographic study of laboratory practices that stands out for proposing a series of issues to be analyzed. These issues include the enunciative modalities of scientific formulations, the modes of inscription of empirical proofs, and the production of the world from the operations undertaken in laboratories. A more didactic explanation of the conclusions of this book can be found in texts such as *Science in Action* by Latour (1987) or *After Method* by Law (2004). Another important aspect is the increase in the number of actors during this process: the scientific community, public representation, the interests of allies (the pharmaceutical industry, the army, or research funding institutions), the modes of mobilizing the world (or modes of inscription), and a series of nonhuman agents (Latour, 1999). These works focus on the controversial, uncertain, and oscillating aspect of science in its "procedurality", before any stabilization of the statements and supporting efforts take place (a process called the closing of the black box).

Good sources for examining the history of psychology are the studies of Political Epistemology (EP) promoted by authors such as Stengers (1989, 1992) and Despret (1999, 2004 e 2011), among others. In *How to talk about the body?* Latour (2004) enumerates 08 principles of PE that delimit the positions of these authors in regards to knowledge. For these authors, scientific knowledge is never the result of purification of data, where the only role of the researcher is to represent the objects using well-constructed sentences. It is rather produced as an articulation and coaffectation among entities along with the unexpected production of results. As an articulation, scientific knowledge can no longer be distinguished by a good or bad representation, but by a good or bad articulation. In the first case, we have a situation where the articulation is extorted or conditioned to a punctual response, leading the researched entities to a place of "docility". In the second case, we have an articulation where the testimony goes beyond a mere response, opening up to the risk of invalidating the questions and propositions of the researcher and to the proposal of new questions by the researched entities. Here we have a recalcitrant relationship.

These assumptions influence how these authors approach laboratory studies. These subjects of analysis are present, for example, as a mixture of recalcitrance and extortion in a series of evaluations of psychoanalytic practices conducted by Stengers (1989). In this sense, psychoanalysis was able to create a device for the free discourse of its subjects that differed from psychiatry while also creating a type of laboratory in the controlled production of transference (Stengers, 1992). In other instances, however, it went into the opposite direction by protecting itself from risk, both in the search for a transcendental grounding

associated with the concept of the unconscious (Stengers, 1989) and in shifting the problem of influence beyond its boundaries (Stengers, 1992). Stengers thereby argued that psychoanalysis again submitted itself to the risk of recalcitrance when it reconsidered what it had removed in delineating its scientific boundaries: hypnosis and influence (Stengers, 1992).

Despret, moreover, undertakes a more detailed analysis of the political practices of what we call psychological laboratories (1999, 2004, 2011). In her studies of the laboratory versions of the studies of emotion (1999) and in her studies of the Hans case, she offers an interpretation of the political meanings of laboratory practices in psychology (Despret, 2004). In the latter work, she analyzed the introduction of a new character in the field of introspective-experimental devices (based on the training of observer-subjects) that were present in psychological laboratories at the turn of the 20th century: the naïve subject. This character makes an entrance at a time when there was a need to introduce a collaborator into the laboratory who would not know what was being proposed as an object of study. Thereby, over the course of the 20th century, the subject framed in this way is considered to validate the experimental method. Despret thoroughly studied how the Austrian psychologist Oskar Pfungst, in the first decade of the 20th century, introduced this character, aiming at controlling any influence that a human agent who knew the answer to the given questions could have on Hans' answers, through simple indirect clues or emotional responses. This minor character took an ever more defined form in the laboratory studies of approaches such as gestaltism through the critique of the biases acquired by training and in behaviorism through the challenge of the introspective method itself, which was considered subjective and inaccurate (see Ferreira, 2012).

The ascension of the experimental method including the naïve subject first seems like the triumph of a more objective psychology that is without any prior influence of the researcher or of any theoretical referential regarding the authentic actions of its witnesses. Despret (2004) established that the possibility of recalcitrance of the psychological witnesses became even more problematic in the presence of devices that work with the participants in a position of "naïveté". Here we have a reversion of the majority of the manuals of the history of psychology, such as Boring's (1950): the transition of the trained subject to the naïve subject is not a step forward of psychological knowledge in the direction of objectivity and control, but a step backward in the possibility of recalcitrance, generating docile, asymmetrical, and limiting articulations regarding its witnesses: "Subjects without the excellence of expertise do not pose a risk of taking up a position in investigations" (Despret, 2004, p. 97). A considerable amount of psychological research is based on this pact, and thus other possibilities of interchange between researchers and research subjects are inhibited.

The Strong Program and the first laboratories in Western Europe

Different from the EP, the SP authors work with different questions concerning the different kinds of hierarchies present in the psychological laboratories. In 1995, Martin Kusch published the paper “Recluse, interlocutor, interrogator: natural and social order in turn-of-the-century psychological research schools”, which advocates an integration between the “research school” approach of historians of science and the “leadership styles” approach of sociologists of science. This integration resulted in a fruitful framework of analysis that allows for the inclusion of both “natural” and “social” factors in the study of scientific knowledge. This project was later continued in the first part of his book, *Psychological Knowledge: A Social History and Philosophy* (1999), where Kusch includes other “social” factors, such as religious and political affiliation. In order to propose and show the advantages of his framework of analysis, Kusch develops a case study about one of the main scientific controversies that took place from the end of the 19th century to the beginning of the 20th century in the field of psychology: the Imageless-Thought controversy.

The Imageless-Thought controversy involves psychologists’ dispute about whether or not it is possible (or not) to have processes in consciousness that are not reducible to basic elements such as sensations, representations, and affects. These processes would be “imageless” precisely because there was no “image” as an element in their foundation, thus being recognized by their advocates as a new and different class of phenomena, irreducible to more basic processes. The controversy had two main parties in Germany. One party, led by Wilhelm Wundt, insisted that *all* psychological processes that could be studied by experimental methods – only sensation and perception – were reducible to sensations, representations, and affects. The other party, represented by the Würzburg School, announced that they were registering processes of consciousness that their experimental subjects were not able to reduce to the traditional basic elements.

So much is well known from textbooks on the history of psychology, but Kusch’s (1999) treatment turned this debate into a rich case for understanding some of the main features of psychological science of the time. First, he examined the Würzburg School’s theories, procedures, and social organization using primary sources. Second, he added new factors to the traditional analyses of the controversy, mainly the “leadership styles” of each party and the “place of knowledge” that each party defended. Third, Kusch introduced a new thesis: although one cannot suggest a causal relationship between social aspects and natural aspects, one can see that the social order defended by a school is reflected in other aspects of the same school, such as its theory of mind or its view of psychology as a field. In this regard, Wundt established a hierarchical social order and a hierarchical theory of consciousness, while the Würzburg School established an egalitarian hierarchical social order and an egalitarian theory of consciousness¹.

¹ Kusch’s view on the relationship between the social order and the natural order is formulated in a few different ways in his paper. Sometimes he finds that the social order is “reflected in” the natural order

Kusch (1995, p. 421) develops his analysis through five main discussion frames:

1. *The scientific theories*, that is, the theories of mind defended, considering how each party conceives the way consciousness is structured, which elements are the fundamental ones, and which processes are open to experimental investigation;

2. *The “place of knowledge”*, that is, how each party understands which social conditions are necessary to the production of knowledge and whether knowledge demands solitude or interaction, mutual contribution, and conversation;

3. *Experimental designs*, that is, how each party organizes the introspective experiments, how the relationship and the authority function between the experimental subject and the experimenter;

4. *Conceptions of the interrelations between subdisciplines*, that is, how each party conceives the divisions within the field of psychological knowledge and their relationships;

5. *The social order, mainly the director’s style of leadership*, that is, how the social order is more or less hierarchical, more or less egalitarian, and what the relations are between the director of the research school and its researchers.

Natural and social order in Wundt’s Leipzig Laboratory

Wundt advocated for a theory of consciousness that separated lower mental processes and higher mental products. The former, encompassing sensation and perception, were subject to investigation through the experimental method of 'inward perception [*innere Wahrnehmung*]. The higher mental processes were products such as thought, imagination, memory, myth, and religion, all of which Wundt considered too complex for experimental manipulation in the laboratory. For Wundt, the latter were *products* precisely because they were the result of the action of the “apperception” which is an active process which transformed the elements upon which it operates into phenomena that are not just the sum total of its components, but a ‘whole bigger than its parts’. For this reason, the investigation of these products of consciousness requires a different method, which Wundt named ‘psychology of the folks’ [*Völkerpsychologie*], what we would nowadays consider to be a sort of historical or ethnological analysis. Thus, in Wundt we have a *hierarchical theory of consciousness* where there are two

(Kusch, 1995, p. 427); in another formulation, he shows that there are “parallels” (*ibid.*, p. 428) between the social and natural orders; in another formulation, he finds that “the social order [...] repeated the natural order” (*ibid.*, p. 428); in yet another formulation, he shows that the social order goes “hand in hand” with the natural order (*ibid.*, p. 432); in still another formulation, he explains that the natural order “can be read as a justification for” the social order (*ibid.*, p. 428, 438); finally, in still another formulation, he claims that defenders of a certain social order “will be tempted to develop or defend” certain conceptions about the natural order. However, Kusch makes it clear that he is not defending a “static and deterministic” (*ibid.*, p. 421) interpretative model nor “a causal link running from the social structure of research schools to their scientific theories” (*ibid.*, p. 438).

layers – one of lower and the other of the higher mental processes – and each layer requires its specific method.

For Wundt, the proper “place of knowledge” was solitude. Wundt, on the one hand, directed the experimental-laboratory research of the lower processes for his students and, on the other hand, occupied himself *alone* with the research on *Völkerpsychologie*, which he considered the main part of psychology dealing with more complex phenomena. Despite this separation, even in the laboratory research, there was a *solitude ideal*, as in the research in *Völkerpsychologie*. In experimental research, the mechanization of the experiments using instruments increasingly diminished the need for an experimenter to help or interact with the experimental subject during the experiments. Wundt further conceived that it was best for the experimental subject to be left alone as he recorded and reported his inward perception because the presence of another person was considered to interfere with the experimental subject’s reporting. Concerning *Völkerpsychologie*, Wundt was the only one authorized to develop a theory in this area. He did all his research in this area alone and the students only had access to his results through his lectures and books long after the research had already been conducted.

We noted how Wundt’s experimental design was mechanized so that, in the *ideal* situation, there would be no need for the experimental setting of a second person besides the experimental subject and the mechanical instruments for stimulus application and the recording of results. In experiments where there was an experimenter, the experimental setting was designed to exclude any interference that could occur on the experimenter’s part. Thus, the use of questions, dialogs, suggestions, or any type of interaction beyond stimulus application was considered by Wundt to ruin the validity of the results, because such were variables incapable of control.

Wundt’s division of psychology was also *hierarchical* due to his division of lower and higher mental processes. The lower processes such as the tasks assigned to students were simpler and could be studied experimentally, but the higher processes could not be studied experimentally because they were too complex, demanding another method which was the *Völkerpsychologie* that Wundt exercised himself. Thus, psychology was divided into a lower part, experimental psychology, and a higher part, *Völkerpsychologie*. This distinction entailed a *value* distinction whereby the experimental research was held as a *Vorschule* for psychology, while *Völkerpsychologie* investigated the most important part of psychology. Until its theoretical foundations were already well established, Wundt was a strict defender of the idea that psychology as a *Wissenschaft* should not be involved with practical areas such as pedagogy, medicine, law, etc.

Finally, the social order in Wundt’s laboratory was also *hierarchical* where Wundt was the leader of the laboratory, selecting according to his own interests what each researcher would research in his experiments. He did not react in a supportive way to his students’ independent work and ideas, and some of his students were aware that Wundt could not conceive that they could ever do or develop any task that the master had not already set. Moreover, his students saw

Wundt as strictly inaccessible, for they pretty much only saw him when he left his solitude to give his lectures, where he preached what his students must know about psychology.

Kusch's analysis shows some relationships between the natural and social orders that are reminiscent of Wundt:

The two-tier hierarchy of the mind could be used as a justification for the two-tier hierarchy within psychology as a field of knowledge, and both in turn could be used to lend plausibility to the hierarchical 'division of labor' in Wundt's institute. (Kusch, 1995, p. 428).

Thus, the division between higher and lower mental processes was the base and justification for the division between experimental psychology and *Völkerpsychologie* and also for the division between the work the students were supposed to do – experimental psychology – and the work the master was supposed to do – *Völkerpsychologie*. Moreover, “the social order of the experiment had the same hierarchical structure” (*ibid.*, p. 428), since the experiments were based on a *solitude ideal* and the authority was located in the experimental subject, who should not be disturbed or influenced by the experimenter (if even present).

Natural and Social Order at Würzburg School

The Würzburg School had quite different “natural” and “social” orders in opposition to Wundt. First, concerning the *theory of mind*, the Würzburg psychologists opposed the view that the study of higher mental processes and products – thought, imagination, memory, etc. – could not be conducted experimentally. By proposing a method of “systematic experimental introspection” which was in several ways different from Wundt's *innere Wahrnehmung*, the Würzburg psychologists considered themselves able to study higher processes by experimental means. There was no need to adopt a complementary method, as Wundt did with *Völkerpsychologie* because, for the Würzburg School, *all* psychological phenomena could be studied experimentally. One of the reasons for this view was that those higher processes, such as thought, were not as complicated or complex as Wundt believed. Thus, the Würzburg School's theory of mind was *non-hierarchical* or *egalitarian*.

The place of knowledge is in interchange and communication for the Würzburg School. The production of knowledge depends on a social organization in which researchers can develop their own research projects but are in constant dialogue with others' theories, methods, and results. Although the Würzburg psychologists are considered as constituting a “school”, they did not agree on everything. Theories created by one member were later used or reviewed by other researchers, and researchers usually took part in the experiments of others.

This appreciation of cooperation can also be seen in the *experimental design*. In opposition to Wundt, Würzburg psychologists did not consider the presence and action of another person in the experimental setting to be a problem. Not only was it not a problem, but the realization of any experiment was conceived as necessarily including two persons: the experimenter and the experimental subject. The relationship between the experimenter and the experimental subject in the experiments should be *egalitarian* and *reciprocal* where the experimenter should allow the experimental subject to use the words that the subject prefers and the experimenter should choose tasks for the experiments taking into account the experimental subject's tastes and predilections. The use of questions after the introspection was not seen as a bad intervention or as biased suggestions, but as useful tools to help the experimental subject remember or focus on some aspects he ignored in his initial report. Moreover, some Würzburg psychologists claimed that some sort of interpersonal empathy was necessary, that intimacy and trust between the experimenter and the experimental subject would help the experiment to proceed in a useful way.

Concerning the view of psychology as a discipline, the Würzburg psychologists did not see any need for a strict division between experimental psychology of the lower processes and a *Völkerpsychologie* of the higher products. Experimental psychology could use "systematic experimental introspection" to investigate all psychological processes. The Würzburg psychologists were much more open than Wundt in reference to the relationship between psychology and applied areas because they were in constant contact with those areas, sometimes even using untrained experimental subjects in their experiments. Külpe, for example, accepted laboratory researchers who had already studied or still worked in applied areas such as pedagogy, medicine, law, etc.

Concerning the social order, mainly the leadership style, it is possible to see the contrasts between the place of Külpe as the director of the Würzburg School and Wundt as the director of the Leipzig laboratory. First, Külpe preferred not to choose what each researcher studied; for him, each researcher should be free to choose what he wanted to investigate. In opposition to Wundt, who would leave the experimental work to his students so that he could concentrate on his *Völkerpsychologie*, Külpe would take part in his researchers' experiments and considered it a duty of *every* member of the laboratory to participate. The main discoveries and theoretical statements of the Würzburg School, moreover, were not usually made by Külpe, but by Marbe, Ach, and Bühler. Thus, against Wundt's *hierarchical* social order, Külpe and the Würzburgers developed a much more *egalitarian* social order.

In the same way as the Wundt case, we can establish some relations between Kusch's five factors: "The egalitarian spirit of the Würzburg laboratory and its emphasis on the equality of experimenter and experimental subject went hand in hand with an egalitarian model of the human mind" (Kusch, 1995, p. 432). In opposition to Wundt, however, it is not *hierarchy* but *equality* that is at play in both "social" and "natural" orders. The Würzburg laboratory politics context enabled a social order in the laboratory that encourages interchange

among researchers and a social order in the experimental setting that emphasizes empathy, communication, and trust; and a natural order that does not divide consciousness between lower and higher processes and thus does not divide psychology strictly into two subdisciplines or into two methodologies.

Historiographic issues relating to psychology laboratories in Brazil

We related some cases such as the naive subject and the hierarchy in the laboratories connected to EP and SP, but we now turn to the implications entailed in the examination of psychological laboratories in Brazil. This turn involves examining the connections of these laboratories to their functions in the broader context of institutions. We propose inquiries that establish the politics of the laboratories according to the STS frame. But more than proposing STS questions, we understand the political aspect of these laboratories through their ontologies, or political ontology (Law, 2004). As Latour (1983) suggested, laboratories are places that produce natures and societies. It is in this wide sense that Brazilian laboratories will be examined here: how they create political features that shape Brazilian society.

In Brazil, the starting point of a supposed scientific psychology is usually marked by very superficial knowledge of the first laboratory practices. As far as is known, there were few laboratory practices that existed between the dawn and the middle of the First Republic, which is consistent with the little documentation found to date that can better elucidate them. Document collections, on the assumption that they exist, are yet to be found, studied, and analyzed. On the other hand, it is possible, and this hypothesis should not be discarded, that some of these few practices did not even produce records of their existence or, if they did, this material was not perpetuated over generations or was not adequately preserved.

The curious fact is that the number of mentions and references to Brazilian psychology laboratories that appear in our narratives are not accompanied by a more detailed, descriptive work of their practices. The laboratories were monumentalized and their significance in the history of psychology was overestimated, without at least their activities being properly elucidated. When the question is asked: "What was produced in the laboratories that were under the leadership of Manoel Bomfim and Maurício de Medeiros?" a more satisfactory answer to the activities of institutions such as these is yet to be written. If a supposed meaning of laboratories in the process of making psychology autonomous seems to be a matter that has already been clarified among some historians, on the other hand, the question raised undoubtedly transports us from an illuminated point to a region of twilight and almost complete darkness.

The present text is not an attempt to answer these problems, nor is it an exhaustive exercise in describing experimental practices in psychology in Brazil. We will seek to analyze certain issues related to the psychology laboratory regarding a perception of its relevance by the so-called Brazilian intelligentsia

and its function, based on two examples of laboratories whose practices were linked to the field of education.

Consider the preliminary question that informs our following inquiry: What was the use of psychological experimentation, whether in educational or psychiatric institutions? In the field of psychiatry, psychology was used as (1) a framework that supported the theoretical foundation for understanding the normal and pathological manifestations of the faculties of the soul, (2) a diagnostic and prognostic aid, and (3) the incorporation of means and techniques for the prophylaxis and cure of mental illnesses. The role of the laboratory was mainly as a diagnostic and prognostic aid because its devices served to measure variations in pathological manifestations. The psychological examination was a complementary tool in the attribution of a medical diagnosis.

In education, the laboratory had an equivalent function where, if a teacher observed that a particular student offered resistance "to the influences of education" (Bomfim, 1928, p. 360), the laboratory entered the scene as a scientific device that would help in the examination with the purpose of verifying the degree of abnormality of that student. According to Bomfim, "school abnormals" ranged from cases that were considered mild (the "mentally weak") to the most serious, such as "imbeciles" or "deep idiots" (ibid. p. 355-358). Once the examination had been carried out and the diagnosis of the school abnormality had been established, the next step is well articulated by Basilio de Magalhães:

Now, one of two things: - either this child is literarily educable, and, in such a case, it is necessary that special schools are provided, where they will be entrusted to the care of a suitable teacher, after being examined by an Academic, who shall not leave them unattended; or this child is literally uneducable, but capable of receiving, with benefit, a treatment befitting their condition, and, in such a hypothesis, it is necessary to take them to suitable establishments, where they are to be entrusted to the care of specialist physicians. (1913, p. 47).

The laboratory is a mediator in deciding the child's future as either destined to a special class or school, or they would be taken to a special institution (e.g. an asylum) for serious cases unable to go through the educational process in schools. In this latter case, children would be put under the care of a doctor and would suffer all the infamy that characterizes this group of abnormal individuals. They would be stigmatized as failures of the adaptive process and possibly permanently useless to themselves, their family, and their country.

The idea of transferring the child to another class or institution included the possibility of their return to ordinary classes where students were constructed as physically and psychologically healthy beings. In this sense, the role of the laboratory was situated in the wake of calls for pedagogical transformations and reforms in public education. It was time for the teacher to know not only the content to be taught but the students themselves. This knowledge was what Basilio de Magalhães called the "student's psychophysiological curriculum" (p. 145). A curriculum that was certainly not written by the parents or the students themselves, but an enigma to be elucidated by the observation of the teachers and, above all, by the scientific examinations used in the laboratories (or offices).

The practice of mental orthopedics necessarily implied prior knowledge of the physical and psychological aspects that were twisted. From this point of view, it is not surprising that experimental psychology gained ground in the school environment where precisely its methods responded to an interest in the area of public education. Having sketched some lines for this introductory question that will be taken up later, we can now move on to the other proposed subject.

When Claparède describes a brief historical overview of pedology in different countries around the globe, he comments on Brazil as follows:

In Brazil, pedology is under-represented. In São Paulo, Quaglio, author of a Compendium of Pedology (1911), works for its development, having created a Faculty of Pedology in the Capital. In 1897, Mr. Medeiros e Albuquerque created a laboratory of experimental psychology in the *Pedagogium* of Rio de Janeiro, and later a professorship of pedagogical anthropology. It was vigorously opposed; they censured him for these 'fantasy innovations' and none of his creations subsisted. (1940, p. 76, author's emphasis)

Note how the *Pedagogium's* experimental psychology laboratory was created in 1897 and the censorship was suffered by Medeiros and Albuquerque². It also highlights how psychology in Brazil at the end of the 19th century was part of a network of tensions in the discourse among intellectuals. The conflict mentioned by Claparède is an example of this tension, and it was most likely carried out by critics of materialism and positive philosophy. The attack by certain sectors of the Brazilian intelligentsia on Medeiros e Albuquerque, however, is not something that remained in the 19th century, when these philosophical currents began to be discussed. It is worth remembering the tension reported by Centofanti (1982) between Catholic intellectuals and the Institute of Psychology that was founded in 1932, after the conversion of the experimental psychology laboratory at the *Colônia de Psicopatas do Engenho de Dentro* (*The Colony of psychopaths from Engenho de Dentro*). Certain barriers offered resistance to the advancement of these ideas in national territory in the accounts of defenders of new trends in psychology (and natural sciences in general). Barriers were erected by those who judged the transformations in the scenario of philosophy and natural sciences as a harmful excess of materialism that corrupted society. It is in this scenario that we can place Claparède's comment.

The year 1897 as the foundation of the *Pedagogium* laboratory attracts attention for creating a certain historiographical inconsistency. This is the year that Centofanti attributes to the creation of this laboratory in the aforementioned study, with Claparède as a reference. It so happens that some works mention the year 1906 as the founding date of this experimental psychology laboratory (Antunes, 2012, p. 68; Massimi, 1990, p. 72; Pinheiral, 2011, p. 376). However, a reading of Article 2 of Decree number. 100, published in the collection of municipal laws and vetoes of 1898, provides us with a clue on this issue:

² The reflections about the date here do not seek to discuss what would have been the first psychology laboratory in Brazil, but its period of operation.

It is incumbent upon him to organize and maintain the pedagogical museum, a laboratory of experimental psychology especially intended for pedagogical research, offices for the practical study of physical and natural sciences, and pedagogical exhibitions. (1898, p. 253).

Following the reading of the Decree, Article 41 states that:

The editor of *Revista Pedagógica* [*Pedagogic Review*] will be in charge of the direction of the psychology laboratory, whose installation can already be commissioned by the School Board, on account of the funds - School supplies - and- School activities- for the future accounting period. (p. 260).

The passages of the decree suggest that the laboratory was conceived and proposed at the end of the 19th century, but as the installation was still to be commissioned and so its inauguration could only effectively take place sometime later. The first references found about the *Pedagogium's* experimental psychology laboratory date from 1902 and 1903. In fact, the 1902 article contains the regulations and decrees concerning the *Pedagogium*, that is, the laboratory was still only on paper, it was something planned with the aim of a future implementation (*Correio da Manhã*, November 25, 1902, p. 2)³. However, the 1903 text already suggests the concrete presence of a laboratory in the institution, commenting that the *Pedagogium* has the "resources of the laboratory of experimental psychology" (*A Notícia*, December 31, 1903, p. 2). Although it is not possible to conclude that its inauguration was, in fact, in 1903, a text from 1904 affirms the fact that Bomfim was the director of the psychology laboratory (*O Paiz*, August 13, 1904, p. 3). Thus, with these records, we can assume that the laboratory was installed between 1898 and 1904. This interval could be understood as the time required for the importation of the devices and, given the lack of competent Brazilian professionals in this new psychology who could teach courses of experimental psychology, Bomfim's training with Alfred Binet in France.

What would this laboratory have produced? Regarding the subject of laboratories in the history of psychology in Brazil, the activities of the *Pedagogium* laboratory are perhaps the most enveloped by questions. The few sources found on this issue reveal that Bomfim at least carried out teaching activities in the laboratory. The press release of the experimental psychology courses coordinated by Bomfim shows that the laboratory space was used for practical classes. In the course program, as shown in an article published in the newspaper *A Notícia*, on May 2, 1916 (p. 1), it is stated that the classes taught methods and techniques of psychological experimentation with the use of devices. The program explicitly mentions the ergograph, but the themes of the classes suggest that instruments such as a dynamometer and esthesiometer were also used in practical classes.

³ The direction of the experimental psychology laboratory at *Pedagogium* was discussed in this article published in *Correio da Manhã*. The author of the comments points to the need for the laboratory to be run by a person "who has publicly demonstrated high competence; otherwise, the aforementioned laboratory will become a sorcery shop".

The article comments that Bomfim's courses, which provided knowledge of experimental psychology, could be of great use to the teaching profession since it would help in the teachers' observations in the case of abnormal children, but the course mostly attracted the attention of physicians. To train doctors and professors interested in the new methods and techniques of experimental psychology, Bomfim taught contents that were present in the main manuals of physiological and experimental psychology of his time: reaction time, fatigue, memory, attention, threshold awareness, and the association of ideas, among other topics. In addition to the practical classes in the laboratory, the space was available for students to carry out autonomous investigations under the guidance or not of Bomfim.

It is worth remembering, by way of contextualization, that the proposal of the experimental psychology laboratory in the field of education was aligned with the purposes of the *Pedagogium* itself. Remember Kuhlmann Jr. (2013), who in referring to the institution's regulations, stated that the purpose of the *Pedagogium* would be:

To become a driving force for the reforms and improvements that national education needs, offering public and private teachers the means of professional instruction they may need, exposure to the best methods and the most improved teaching material. (p. 37).

By offering new methods and techniques for the psychological examination of schoolchildren, experimental psychology would help in teacher training and ultimately contribute to public education. Bomfim's course could be understood in the light of the proposals for the reform of public education that were much discussed among intellectuals of his time, and whose resonances can be found in the Brazilian media.

In terms of the assumption that the *Pedagogium* laboratory was used in the training of doctors and teachers, Bomfim's (1928[1917]) *Noções de Psychologia* [*Outlines of Psychology*] verified that Bomfim had published research from activities in the laboratory there. We emphasize, however, that the book was intended to assist in the teaching of psychology, especially in normal schools, and was therefore not intended to be a means of disseminating laboratory research. The evidence is scant, but at the end of the second edition of the book Bomfim included an appendix composed of two texts: "a characterization of school abnormalities" and "an analysis of fatigue". The first appendix is a more theoretical exposition and aims to incorporate diagnostic categories into the understanding of childhood abnormality and the second approaches psychological examination in practice. Therein Bomfim describes experiments regarding fatigue and the use of devices such as the esthesiometer, the ergograph, and the dynamometer for this purpose. Devices that evaluate, respectively, the consciousness threshold, fatigue, and muscle strength, themes present in the course program. The problem is that Bomfim does not offer clear indications that the experiments described in this chapter are the product of research carried out in the laboratory, but at certain moments it ends up leaving the reader in doubt. For example, the chapter is divided into the topics "verifications carried out",

"surveys in schools" and "verified results". Although he never mentions the *Escola Normal do Rio de Janeiro* (Normal School of Rio de Janeiro) or even the *Pedagogium*, he uses passages such as "however, it was not possible to establish a precise relationship (.)" or even "the exercises made especially with the research of the classes (.)" (1928, p.369), generating some confusion as to whom exactly he was referring to. In describing the research and its results, Bomfim certainly referred to authors such as Binet and Ebbinghaus to enter into dialogue with the literature of his time and expose the state of the art of research on the subjects he dealt with. At other times, however, his descriptions lack direct references to the authors.

The work *Pensar e Dizer* (*To Think and to Say*), from 1923, is somewhat curious regarding this subject. Here Manoel Bomfim suggests that he carried out research and accumulated data, but assumes that he did not obtain satisfactory results so that he could organize and publish them. On the other hand, this is a text in which Bomfim criticizes the experimental method. Portugal (2010) comments that it is also possible to find "severe criticism of the experimental procedure" in the text *O Método dos Testes* (*The Tests Method*), published by Bomfim in 1928.

In any case, comments on the activities of this laboratory or even on experimental psychology in Brazil make a more accurate historical analysis even more complex. A brief mention by Moncorvo Filho (1926) of the laboratory can be found in the passage "this laboratory actually set up there seems to never have started its work, which without a doubt could have been of the greatest use." (p. 187). Which works, precisely, would Moncorvo Filho be referring to? Expanding on the issue and moving on to a more general comment on experimental psychology in Brazil, Farias Brito (1912) wrote a short essay in which he denounced the delays that psychology had been suffering. The intellectual atmosphere, in his view, was not prepared for the new trends in psychology, nor was the Brazilian soil conducive to fertilizing the seed of this new science. Referring precisely to experimental psychology, Farias Brito asserts:

In our country, unfortunately, we have nothing that can be mentioned here. If you ask yourself: what is there among us on this very important subject that has so greatly aroused the interest of the most eminent men in all the educated countries of the world? The answer should be this: nothing, absolutely nothing. (p. 277).

This text is quite suggestive concerning the obstacles faced by Brazilian intellectuals who intended to germinate the new practices of this science of the soul that emerged in Europe and the United States some decades ago. The tensions produced in Brazil around the possibility of an experimental science of the soul are found in different sources, and in Farias Brito such tensions acquire dramatic contours:

And whoever intends to cultivate it there, risks suffering the disappointment of those who sow in the rough rock, on boulders, where the plant cannot take root, or among thorns that will not let it grow. What is certain is that no one wished to react against our overwhelming sterility with regard to the study of the human

spirit, that is, with regard to the study of our own nature in its deepest significance. (p. 278).

The chapter in question is part of the book *A base física do espírito (The physical basis of the spirit)*, which was published in Rio de Janeiro in 1912, in the same city and almost a decade after the inauguration of the *Pedagogium* laboratory. So, a question remains: if the laboratory headed by Bomfim has really existed and carried out teaching and research activities, why did Farias Brito write those passages so decisively? With the information we have analyzed so far, even though the number of primary sources has not been satisfactory, we can at least raise the hypothesis that the experimental psychology laboratory installed at the *Pedagogium* was not a large center for teaching and research like the well-known European laboratories so present in the general historiography of psychology. Its activities seem to have been more discreet, possibly more focused on teaching, and did not produce a legacy to be perpetuated by later generations of doctors and educators, to acquire notoriety and mark its presence in historiography as an expressive center of teaching and production of psychology.

In contrast, the same cannot be said about the laboratory created at the *Escola Normal Secundária de São Paulo (Normal School from São Paulo)*. Centofanti's works (2006, 2014) are an important contribution to the historiography of this institution. Consider works published by Clemente Quaglio⁴ that are based on his experiences with students from the *Escola Modelo Caetano de Campos (São José dos Campos Normal School)*, which was attached to the aforementioned *Escola Normal (Normal School)*. It is not clear whether Quaglio used the laboratory's facilities for these studies, but the names of the instruments suggest that they were part of the laboratory's collection. These works were compiled in the book *Estudos de Psicologia Experimental e Pedagógica (Studies of Experimental and Pedagogic Psychology)*, published in 1921. The richness of Quaglio's articles, even though they are relatively short, is not only related to the descriptions of the experiments but also to his considerations regarding childhood and education in Brazil.

The ideal of the adult as a rational being that is shaped by a childhood transformation, with the educator having an important role in this process, is a notable discourse in the text *O raciocínio na criança (On reasoning in children)*. The child is represented as a typical being that has not yet learned to perceive the world with good clarity because it is unable to properly judge and reason about the elements of which it is composed. This doesn't happen because the child lacks a nervous apparatus underlying the corresponding mental faculties or because of any type of organic or psychic pathology. The child, although it does not belong to the group of school abnormalities, is represented as being endowed with sentimental impulses, and these tend to select elements from the environment, coloring some and neglecting others. Emotions in children are characterized as an obstacle to an accurate understanding of objects in the world.

⁴ For a biography and professional trajectory of Clemente Quaglio, see Monarcha (2007). The author comments on a Pedagogical Anthropology and Experimental Psychology laboratory that Quaglio created in 1909, in a school in the city of Amparo. In the collection of General Works of the National Library there are several texts by Quaglio, but we did not verify evidence or productions from this laboratory.

According to Quaglio, to possess reasoning, "it is indispensable: to observe well and to clearly perceive; and the school can have a great influence on the student to guide them well in these two forms of psychic activity." (1921, p. 101).

In terms of measurement and evaluation, Quaglio describes the results of his experiment in which he used the "Logorthoscopio Pizzoli". Briefly, the students observed some boards and were asked what happened in the illustrated situation⁵. Through reports on the boards, the experimenter could assess logical reasoning, the presence of feelings in the stories, the degree of concreteness and reality, among other aspects that orbit around reasoning and what could blunt it. Not only did Quaglio study reasoning in these texts, but he also devoted himself to the experimental examination of attention in one hundred children, as suggested by the title of his work "Study on the attention of one hundred Brazilian children". The principle was this: blood flows in abundance into an organ when it works (1921, p. 9). In the case of attention, when an individual directs it to an object or when solving a mathematical calculation, the volume of blood would increase in the brain as it was undergoing intense activity. One way of examining this blood flow was through the scale experiment: the child (or the individual being examined) was immobilized on a scale and, in the exercise of any activity, such as those mentioned above, the scale tended to lean towards the side of the head.

However, the experiment engineered by Quaglio involves the use of the "Myokinesiscopio". It was not intended to assess the child's attention exactly, but their motor coordination in terms of fine movements and gross movements that were recorded as errors in the device⁶. The relationship between motor coordination and psychic faculties is indicated by Quaglio in the following terms:

For the execution of all these various muscular acts, a complex intellectual operation is indispensable, to which many psychic faculties and very delicate parts of the nervous centers contribute. Thus, when measuring dexterity in movements, we sought to examine the child's psychological aspects. (1921, p. 18).

In what terms did Quaglio express the usefulness of these results of psychological experimentation for education? Quaglio's thinking agrees with the conceptions about the nature of the child, the role of the educator, and the school institution present in the literature of the time. As far as the role of experimental psychology is concerned, it resides in its power to enunciate a truth, not through metaphysical abstractions, but through scientific abstractions, about the functioning of the child. This truth is shown by the discovery of the physical and

⁵ An interesting image that Quaglio attached to the text illustrates a moment of application of this instrument. In it, the presence of some women (possibly teachers or students of the Normal School) is verified manipulating the instrument while a man takes note of the child's reports about the boards. Finding photos in which people are seen next to laboratory instruments, at the time of application or even in the laboratory with other collaborators, are relatively rare findings).

⁶ The Quaglio's descriptions of the "Myocynescopio" is similar to what is called the "Tremometer". We believe that the principle and the experimental situation were very similar. It is possible that it is not exactly the same device, since there were some variations in the models, not only in manufacturing, but also an adaptation that the experimenter often needed to make.

psychic limits of the child, without which education, within the framework of modern and scientific pedagogy, would not take place. According to the author:

It is time for us to follow a new and good path. It is necessary that the prejudice of wanting to worry about what the child should do, without ever knowing what they can do, disappears once and for all. There is a prominent need to carry out long and complex investigations of the psychophysiological organism, by examining and studying children individually. It is necessary to find a happy middle ground between the practice of bodily hygiene and the hygiene of the mind, between physical and intellectual education. It is from these investigations, from these examinations, from these studies that the practice of the educational process must emerge. (1921, p. 27)

Quaglio's conclusion in the passage is revealing. Psychological examination using experimental methods could, to a greater or lesser extent, reveal defects in children. He and other educators of his lineage promoted the need to know more about the child, about their organic and psychic deficiencies that, once identified, led to the necessary interventions without which the educational process would be compromised. If a child had a hearing impairment, for example, the hearing organ should be exercised, so that he or she could learn to read. This was the starting point for teaching reading, which in turn implied the education of this particular body (p. 5). All the child's learning and its consequent psychic development depended on their physiological condition. It is here that we could place Quaglio's texts within the framework of intuitive teaching and education through the senses, which is aimed at the production of healthy bodies and minds.

We can see that the so-called experimental psychology operated in institutions during the period of the First Republic. Psychology was constructed via rhetoric of education and medicine for the good of children and patients, but it also makes possible the political production of material based on examinations. These are documents such as a biographical sheet, a school biographical portfolio, or a history of anthropometrics (e.g., physiological and psychological records of the student) produced from the information (the "facts") collected from experiments. Such productions are, in the words of Basilio de Magalhães (1913, p. 145), the "psychophysiological" curriculum of children. Here, "biographical" overrides more common-sense frames such as the student's name, age, affiliation, etc. They are "bio-graphic" insofar as they include the organic and psychic aspects that constitute the child. The biographical portfolio was a medical and pedagogical tool that was used to record deficiencies diagnosed in (laboratory) exams and also to accompany children throughout the educational process. Consider the school biographical portfolio, a model proposed by Viera de Mello (1917). In Viera de Mello's portfolio proposal (1917, p. 29-37), the document was divided into different sections according to the type of information. Initially, it contained personal data of the examinee ("general notes"), and then it proceeded to the different sections of the exam. The anthropometric section gathered information such as height, arm span, weight, muscle strength, lung capacity, etc. The physical and physiological section was

related to the organic conditions of the eyes, ears, nose, head, neck, etc. And, finally, and of greater interest here, there were the psychophysiological and psychological exams. The first one refers mainly to the child's acuity of the different sense organs, including also language, motility, and internal sensitivity. The psychological examination, on the other hand, was composed of the categories that were very present in the psychology manuals of the time: perception, attention, memory, intelligence, affectivity, will, etc. Interestingly, under the rubric of the psychological examination, the examiner was also supposed to include information about the student's aptitude and vocation. Such forms function to identify and separate the school abnormals from the healthy ones which framed how they were used as tools in the construction of pedagogical interventions according to the deficiencies of this or that student.

Factors ranging from the anthropometric to the psychological were monitored according to a conception of the relationship they maintained with each other. The student's lung capacity, for example, could be indicative of weakness or good physical health which, in turn, indicated the direction of their psychological development. In this sense, an expected height for a given age, good muscle strength, and adequate lung capacity tended to distance the student from the boundaries circumscribe the group of those that were considered "weak" or "abnormal" at that time, with average attention and expected intelligence (or above average), among other psychological factors favorable to a good development. Inattention, for example, could be motivated, in the words of Alfredo de Magalhães, by a state of "general weakness of the organism", or even by "disorders of breathing" (1927, p. 96).

In practice, through the form, the teacher would have basic information about the student at hand that would help a teacher in the pedagogical practice. With better knowledge of the physical characteristics of each student, the teacher would know how to conduct a physical exercise, for example. Knowing students' visual and auditory abilities, a teacher decided which students would need to sit near the front to better follow the class. Aware of the attention and intelligence capabilities of the class, a teacher would know how long to lead a class and how far they could supposedly advance in the content. Here we see the function of the laboratory as an examination center for its visitors. Moreover, Viera de Mello's school biographical portfolio cataloged the aptitude and vocation categories that structured the knowledge of what represented good indicators of an adaptation to work. The physical characteristics were also reported here, since, for example, a "brachisquelo" would be more adapted to work in the workshops, while a "macrosquelo" was more suitable for farming (Magalhães, 1927, p. 56). The school biographical portfolio, in this sense, could be understood as a device linked to the aspirations to produce bodies focused on the world of work, an interpretation that resonates with works such as Gondra's (2000).

Although psychology laboratories are narrated as important institutions in the production of scientific psychology, whether in general history (Boring, 1950; Goodwin, 2010; Schultz & Schultz, 2014) or in Brazil (Antunes, 2012; Massimi, 2013), it is important to remember that psychological examinations were not exclusive to these institutions. Claparède (1940) recalls that:

The processes used to collect the facts differ according to whether patients are studied individually or collectively. The individual experiment is carried out at home, in the laboratory or in an isolated part of the school; the collective experiment can be carried out in the classroom itself. (p.235).

Moving the laboratory experience to other spaces, such as the classroom, allows us to think about the possibility of *training* teachers to use the methods and techniques of psychological experimentation without the need to seek out a laboratory that authorizes the exercise of these practices. A laboratory equipped with experimental physiology and psychology equipment was costly and impractical. Claparède himself pays attention to this issue of high costs when it comes to appliances and their maintenance, even though for him they represent a *sine qua non* condition for investigations conducted on children (p. 263-265). It became important thereby to look for cheaper and more practical options for carrying out observations and exams in schools. Cheaper instruments such as boxes of weights and esthesiometers, in addition to those that only needed pencil and paper, could be cheaply employed by teachers and doctors. The exams which only used paper and pencil were often referred to as the "test" method or one of the types of "test", in the broadest sense of the word, alongside the experimental apparatus that constituted the laboratory's collection (Piéron, 1966). [1951], p. 423; Warren, 1948[1934], p. 358). It is this displacement of the environment and the adaptation of instruments that allows us to understand the collective application of experimental methods outside the limits of the legitimate scientific space that initially characterized their practice.

On this point, Alfred Binet, who since the 1890s was already the target of the typical complimentary mentions that characterized the Brazilian media discourse referred to him as an experimentalist, an illustrious psychologist, or even as the most notable disciple of Charcot. He suggested exercises to be administered in the classroom. In Basilio de Magalhães' manual (1913), the author talks about some methods and exercises to be applied in the classroom, with Binet as the main reference. Consider the example of the dynamometer which was a device whose purpose was to measure muscle strength, and was recommended as an exercise in the classroom. Weekly, the students would press the device so that their strength indicators were monitored over time by the teacher. Not only was an increase in muscle tone the aim, but also the exercise of the will itself, since the collective application favored emulation among the students. By generating some competition, the obligation to tighten the dynamometer gave way to an exercise that was important in the physical and psychological evaluation of children. In addition, another exercise involves the teacher asking the students to remain in the statue position for some time, constraining their movements as best they can. The teacher believes this to be a way for the student to acquire self-control in the face of discomfort and unpleasant stimuli. The student was responsible for becoming master of themselves, a process that took place in the educational context. The theoretical models given by psychology (and also by experimental psychology) are carried out through an exercise that influences the direction of the will through constant

training. The dynamometer and this exercise were not used as part of an experimental examination in psychology but acquired a direct function in the education of the body and the will.

The advent of experimental examinations in psychology in institutions such as educational establishments is part of a real framework of interventions that converged to achieve an objective: subjecting the child's body and mind to harmonize with social order. Faced with a disorganized nature that expressed countless inertia in the course of the educational process, practices of all kinds were added to spark a transformation in the child. Experimental psychology adds to such efforts that were emerging since the 19th century: from hygiene to anthropometry, through pedagogy and pedology. A set of sciences - which often had the appearance of movements - forming a network whose fibers overlap in such a way that an exercise of separating them is not only arduous from a historical point of view but liable to incur a probable artificiality.

Conclusion: The different historiographical colors in political hues

As we proposed in the introduction, this set of analyses of the first laboratories opens up a space for reflection on the research modes of the historical modes of knowledge production in these first laboratories. So far, we have analyzed some historiographical issues related to psychology laboratories in Brazil in the early period of the First Republic, although our contribution has been somewhat discreet, presenting preliminary results and enabling discussion about how these laboratories work in Brazil and who the participants were that worked there. Although discreet, we can understand how these laboratories worked, politically shaping Brazilian society through Psychiatric and Psychological categories.

These questions lead us to a unique description of the configurations of the first laboratories in Brazil. We can thereby begin to account for the politics of their emergence and understand the networks where human and non-human actors are the most diverse. Obviously, the instruments, concepts, specialties, literature, and their ways of implementation were imported from the epistemic metropolises of the moment. But as Gallegos (2018) points out, there is a singularity in how these and other laboratories in Latin American territories were created: they owe nothing to the colonizing lineages of the Wundtian laboratories, who were invested in making a detailed description of the components of the immediate experience that bordered on sensory physiology. Our laboratories operate on the borders of normality and abnormality in schools and asylums, generating reports that allow the social ordering of individuals who circulate in these spaces. In other words, they produce politically new sociabilities. If these laboratories can break with the colonality of a lineage of notorious spaces for the production of psychological knowledge, they would be able to train psychologists as scientists to decolonize a series of pedagogical and daily experiences of infamous men and children under the sign of normality. Perhaps this constitutes a more complex colonality that lacks new historiographies.

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The Stanford Prison Experiment: Still failing the political test

Serdar M. Değirmencioğlu

Abstract

The Stanford Prison Experiment is one of the most famous studies in social psychology and psychology in general. It has been told and retold in classrooms across the world to illustrate the power of social psychology (and psychology in general) in explaining human behavior. Fifty years later, the Stanford Prison Experiment continues to attract considerable scholarly attention. While mainstream psychology still prides itself in the main findings, various scholars claim to have “debunked” them. There has also been discussion regarding the ethical issues involved. This paper offers a critical assessment of the Stanford Prison Experiment with a focus on the historical and political context. When placed in its historical and political context, the Stanford Prison Experiment exemplifies the persistent political shortcomings of mainstream psychology; its critical assessment thus offers lessons for those who are seeking alternatives to mainstream psychology.

Keywords

militarism, colonialism, veterans, Vietnam, Ukraine, War on Terror

The Stanford Prison Experiment [TSPE] is one of the most famous studies in social psychology and psychology in general. It has been cited again and again as evidence for the power of social settings on social behavior. The study has been told and retold in classrooms across the world to illustrate the power of social psychology (and psychology in general) in explaining human behavior. The study was conducted by Philip G. Zimbardo at Stanford University in August 1971 and funded by the U.S. Office of Naval Research. TSPE simulated a prison environment, where university students were assigned the role of either a prisoner or a prison guard. It was intended to assess the power of a prison environment on behavior over a period of two weeks. However, mistreatment of prisoners escalated and Zimbardo terminated the experiment in one week.¹

Fifty years later, Philip G. Zimbardo continues to be treated as a scientific genius and is sought-after as a speaker. He has been invited to deliver keynote speeches at international conferences and congresses again and again. Following

¹ Further information can be found on a website dedicated to the study.

the invasion of Iraq in 2003 and the revelations in 2004 about human rights violations and war crimes against detainees in the Abu Ghraib prison near Baghdad, Zimbardo became popular once again. His opinion was sought out to explain the war crimes in Iraq, particularly in Abu Ghraib. Today, TSPE continues to attract considerable scholarly attention: While mainstream psychology still prides itself in SPE's main findings (Griggs, & Bartels, 2019), some scholars are interested in "debunking" them (e.g., Le Texier, 2019), while others are busy finding ways to resolve the ethical issues (e.g., Perlstadt, 2018).

The goal of this paper is to offer a critical assessment of TSPE with a focus on the historical and political context. Mainstream psychology, with its diversity of branches and shades, is decidedly ahistorical and claims to be a politically neutral discipline. The goal here is to place TSPE in its historical and political context to demonstrate how it exemplifies the persistent political shortcomings of mainstream psychology. Putting TSPE in its socio-historical context requires an examination of how it related to the war on Vietnam, a defining event in the history of the United States of America. Finally, this paper aims to draw lessons for those who are seeking alternatives to mainstream approaches.

The war on Vietnam

The war on Vietnam was a very prolonged campaign and proved to be a very brutal one. The war started in the second half of the 1950s and officially ended in 1975. Many scholars and observers (e.g. Hess, 1994) have characterized the war as a defining event in U.S. history. The number of publications on the war on Vietnam grew in the decades following the war and continues to expand today, almost 50 years after the war officially ended. The number of publications dedicated to the war on Vietnam indicates that this particular war has occupied a central place in the intellectual domain. No other war since World War II has received so much attention. Today, there are thousands of books on the war on Vietnam. They are so numerous that one can find websites offering rankings under titles like "*The best 20 books*," "*Top 30 books*" and so on. What is perhaps even more interesting is that the trend continues year after year. Most of these books about the war on Vietnam are non-fiction, many produced by journalists. More personal books were written by soldiers who wanted to tell their own stories and experiences during the war (Rollins, 1984). Many of these books are hardly known because they were published by small publishers or by the authors themselves and not distributed widely. There are also numerous works of fiction. The earliest is a novel by Graham Greene, titled *The Quiet American*. As early as 1955, Greene was able to expect the consequences of a war on Vietnam: failure, defeat, and withdrawal (Whitfield, 1996).

Silence in psychology

Almost 50 years later after the end of the war, new books on the war on Vietnam are still being published. The fact that some of these books are 400 pages long and very detailed (e.g., Appy, 2016) indicates a rather strange and yet persistent preoccupation with this particular war. It would be hard not to conclude that there is an obsession in the U.S. with the war on Vietnam. This obsession appears to be a consequence of an imperial mentality and a belief in militarism: The U.S. is a modern superpower and therefore it must be invincible. The defeat in Vietnam can only be a result of a major miscalculation somewhere, a strategic failure by the military or a lack of political will. The defeat must be explained away and the belief in the invincibility of the superpower must be restored.

In contrast, there are surprisingly few publications in psychology focusing on the war on Vietnam. Scholarly books and articles are very rare. Even though the war on Vietnam was clearly a burning public issue in the U.S. in the 70s (Rollins, 1984), very few psychologists in the U.S. focused their scholarship on the ongoing war and its consequences. The vast majority of psychologists in the U.S. remained silent as the U.S. government continued a horrific war of attrition (Değirmencioglu, 2010).

The historical context

In 1971, the war on Vietnam was clearly a salient issue in the U.S. The war was on the front pages. In April, U.S. Army First Lieutenant William L. Calley, Jr. was found guilty of murdering 22 civilians in the My Lai massacre and sentenced to life in prison.² In May, thousands of anti-war activists were arrested in Washington, D.C. by the police and military. In June, the New York Times began to publish the Report of the Office of the Secretary of Defense Vietnam Task Force, which came to be known as the “Pentagon Papers.” The Pentagon Papers showed that the U.S. government lied systematically to the public and to the U.S. Congress about the war on Vietnam. Philip Zimbardo conducted TSPE in the same year, in August 1971; yet, the experiment was rarely discussed in relation to the war on Vietnam. Even today, students rarely, if ever, hear a discussion of TSPE in its socio-historical context. Consequently, five decades later, a serious political analysis of TSPE is still sorely needed.

The militarism problem

A rarely discussed problem with TSPE is that the study was funded by the Naval Research Office, or the Navy. The fact that the US military was interested in the

² Convicted of murdering twenty-two villagers at My Lai on 16 March 1968, Calley was sentenced in March 1971 to life imprisonment. That sentence was quickly reduced to 20, then to 10 years. In November 1974, Calley became eligible for parole and was set free. In 1976, he married and took over the management of his father-in-law's business in Columbus, Georgia (Oliver, 2003).

behaviors that TSPE reported has rarely attracted attention from TSPE's critics. This is not surprising given the long-standing alliance of US mainstream psychology with the military. For many mainstream psychologists, an alliance with the military is not a political or an ethical problem (Değirmencioğlu, 2010; 2021). The long-standing alliance with the military is not a matter of individual psychologists working for the military. The alliance is institutionalized and has been promoted as "public service" by the American Psychological Association (APA). As the largest professional organization representing psychology in the U.S. and with a membership above one hundred and fifty thousand, APA plays a central role in mainstream psychology. APA openly and continuously lobbies on behalf of the Department of Veterans Affairs (formerly Veterans Administration), which provides medical care, benefits, and other services to veterans. The Department of Veterans Affairs is the largest employer of psychologists in the U.S.: it employs about 6000 psychologists. It is followed by the U.S. Army, which employs about 800 to 900 psychologists.

Following the September 11 attacks in the U.S., the Bush administration sought to employ psychologists in its "War on Terror." It did not take a long time for the APA administration to cooperate with the U.S. Department of Defense to provide ethical cover for an "interrogation" program and for psychologists working in the program. About a decade later, an independent review was conducted by attorney David Hoffman. Hoffman was hired by APA in November 2014 to investigate whether APA engaged in activity that would constitute collusion with the Bush administration to promote, support or facilitate the use of "enhanced" interrogation techniques by the U.S. in the war on terror (Değirmencioğlu, 2021). The Hoffman Report, which was released in July 2015, provided clear evidence of collusion. The report shook APA and mainstream psychology like an earthquake. Some characterized the collusion as one of the greatest ethical breaches in the history of psychology. The APA administration quickly apologized for "deeply disturbing findings and organizational failures," and announced "policy and procedural actions to correct shortcomings." (Değirmencioğlu, 2021).

The earthquake following the Hoffman Report was but a glitch for the long-standing alliance. It did not take long for the APA administration to engage in damage control. In 2017, APA President Antonio E. Puente released a statement in honor of Veterans Day that confirmed APA's commitment to serving the military and the veterans it produces:

Veterans Day is an opportunity to honor those individuals who have selflessly served to protect our country. APA works throughout the year to acknowledge that spirit, supporting military personnel and veterans, their families and their communities and the psychologists who conduct research for and provide direct services to these military-connected populations. APA strongly advocates for funding and support for veterans' health research and clinical services, including therapies to address post-traumatic stress disorder and depression and more effective suicide prevention efforts in military and veteran populations.

One of the best ways for psychologists to serve our veterans is to better understand their psychological needs. I encourage our members to visit the VA

community provider toolkit, which provides free training modules to better understand military culture and how psychologists can help serve military personnel, veterans, families and communities. I also encourage members of the public to honor our military today in whatever way they can, whether by attending a local Veterans Day celebration or just reaching out to a nearby member of the military and expressing gratitude for his or her service.³

The statement illustrates the problem. Only two years after the Hoffman Report, Puente emphasizes how dedicated APA is to the military personnel, past and present, and how deserving the military personnel was. He also underscores APA's continuing lobbying efforts. What follows is particularly interesting. In the second paragraph, Puente changes his audience and starts speaking as if he were a military spokesperson: He encourages psychologists to learn about the military culture and how they can serve military personnel and veterans, and people around them. Finally, he invites APA members to express their gratitude to members of the military.

A number of prominent psychologists, whose names were associated with the collusion, disputed the findings of the Hoffman Report and some openly attacked those involved in the independent review process. Martin Seligman, for instance, portrayed the criticisms as attempts to "discourage young psychologists from working with the Department of Defense" and he urged APA "not to waver in its long-standing commitment to serve the nation," (Seligman, 2018). Prominent supporters of militarism in psychology continue to equate serving the military with serving the nation (Değirmencioğlu, 2022).

It is clear that mainstream psychology is yet to distance itself from militarism. It is also clear that the move away from militarism toward a focus on preventing injustice will not originate from APA's corporate apparatus or mainstream psychology. APA has not abandoned its long-standing alliance with the military establishment even after the Hoffman Report. The Association continues to promote military psychology, to highlight psychologists working in the military, to present itself as the advocate for the well-being of veterans, and so on (Değirmencioğlu, 2022).

The complicity problem

A second problem with TSPE and the studies following it is that they were disconnected from contemporary wars and from glaring examples of the social-psychological madness these wars created. In typical mainstream fashion, TSPE and other "ground-breaking" work remained politically silent or complicit as far as addressing ongoing wars and imperial, colonial, and racist policies of their times.

A case in point is the slur "gook." Anyone who has some familiarity with the war on Vietnam knows about the wide-spread use of this slur. It is an ethnic

³ The statement was distributed via email on Thursday, 9 November 2017 with the title APA News: "APA Honors Military for Their Service: Association works to support veterans."

slur for a person of Southeast Asian descent, especially a Vietnamese, Filipino, Chinese, Japanese or Korean person. The term is similar to the N-word used in the U.S. for African-American people. In this paper, it will be referred to as the “G-word.” The exact origin of the G-word is not clear. However, it is clear that it is a derogatory term used primarily, but not exclusively, for people who live in South Asian lands. The G-word owes its staying power to the U.S. military: It was primarily and consistently used by the U.S. forces in various wars across time. U.S. military personnel used the G-word to refer to indigenous peoples in the Philippines and in Korea, but the G-word became well-known only during the war on Vietnam as a racial slur.

There has been very little interest in mainstream psychology in the G-word and how this term was employed consistently across decades. A notable exception can be found in a chapter by Leventman and Camacho (1980). They noted the use of the G-word for the Vietnamese as a racial slur. Next, they noted that race, racism and race consciousness were critical in understanding the dynamics of war. Today the G-word rarely, if ever, appears in mainstream psychology. Its staying power is not mentioned or explored in social psychology textbooks. The war on Vietnam, the great suffering that was inflicted on the local population, the intentional environmental destruction, the use of Napalm or Agent Orange are all missing from psychology textbooks. Mainstream psychology rarely disturbs militarism.

The G-word was not unknown to Zimbardo. He did write about it some 25 years after TSPE, in “The Lucifer Effect” (Zimbardo, 2007). The section titled “Dehumanization: The Other as Nothing Worthwhile” opens with a quote: “*Kill a Gook for God* – Penned on helmet of a U.S. soldier in Vietnam” (p.222). In another section of book, Zimbardo examines the G-word to discuss dehumanization and moral disengagement:

Behind the My Lai massacre of hundreds of innocent Vietnamese civilians by American soldiers was the dehumanizing “gooks” label that GIs had for all of those different-looking Asian people. Yesterday's “gooks” have become today's “hajjis” and “towel heads” in the Iraq War as a new corps of soldiers derogates these different-looking citizens and soldiers. “You just sort of try to block out the fact that they're human beings and see them as enemies,” said Sergeant Mejia, who refused to return to action in what he considered an abominable war. “You call them ‘hajjis’, you know? You do all the things that make it easier to deal with killing them and mistreating them.” (pp. 307-308)

Zimbardo himself recognizes part of the problem. In a talk titled “The Lucifer Effect: Understanding How Good People Turn Evil,” at the 18th APS Annual Convention, he offered this striking assessment, “Psychologists rarely ask the big questions.” As usual, Zimbardo was addressing a roomful of psychologists and students eager to hear him talk (Wargo, 2006). He concluded, “*We have all kinds of great techniques for answering small questions. We've never bothered to ask the big questions. It's time we asked the big questions like the nature of evil.*”

The import-export problem

Another glaring problem with the criticisms of TSPE and similar studies is the fact that most of the critics refrained from addressing the political biases exported to the Global South as part of mainstream psychology (Değirmencioğlu, 2021). The way mainstream psychology has been operating across the world can best be described as an “import-export” business (Değirmencioğlu, 2021). The vast number of psychology publications are produced in the Global North. Psychology was born and then institutionalized as a profession in the Global North. The products of mainstream psychology are distributed around the world as knowledge, practice, or models. Journals, books, instruments, software, workshops, and speakers are all marketed globally and often aggressively. Exports always need local importers; they bring the products in and distribute them to the local market. In the past, importers were predominantly academic psychologists. Today, many professional organizations and private firms are also engaged in the import business. The import-export business continues to flourish with diverse products.

Academic psychology is well-organized particularly in the US and in the UK; university degrees have also become big business. Students from the Global South often receive their advanced degrees in the Global North and unknowingly facilitate the import-export business. Graduate students are often exposed to a narrative that sounds a lot like a fairy tale: Objective and hard-working psychologists in the Global North produce theoretical and methodological tools for psychologists around the world. These products are made available to psychologists in the Global South, who adopt them for the benefit of society. Little is mentioned regarding the import-export process and the biases that go along with the imports. When TSPE and other studies in the literature are imported, biases and silences are also imported. Imported textbooks, instructional materials, including videos on popular video platforms such as TED Talks on psychology all bring in persistent biases and silences. The import-export business, thus, serves the spread of persistent biases, such as militarism.

What about critical psychology?

Critical psychology is not necessarily immune to problems and biases that plague mainstream psychology. One such bias appears to be a lack of focus on militarism. Given the centrality of militarism for understanding injustice and suffering across the world (Değirmencioğlu, 2020b), one would expect a strong and sustained critical focus on militarism. One would also expect at least a sizable body of literature in critical psychology focusing on major imperial wars, such as the war on Vietnam and the war on Iraq. For decades, these two wars were, without a doubt, defining influences for millions of people.

In order to make a quick assessment regarding a discipline (or a sub-discipline or a school of thought), one can carry out an analysis of major handbooks that are considered milestones in this discipline’s literature. The

Handbook of Environmental Psychology (Bechtel & Churchman, 2002), for instance, was considered an important milestone in environmental psychology. If this 736-page handbook does not contain any mention of militarism and the devastating environmental impact of military activities, it is fair to make a general statement about the state of environmental psychology at that time (Değirmencioğlu, 2022).

A similar assessment can be carried out for critical psychology on the basis of a recent handbook. The Handbook of Critical Psychology (Parker, 2015) is an important contribution to critical psychology. The 477-page long handbook contains many well-written and informative contributions from a long list of critical psychologists. When examined carefully, however, this volume has little to offer regarding the relationship between mainstream psychology and wars across the world. The handbook does not contain a single analysis of how mainstream psychology responded to the war on Vietnam. There is also no analysis of how mainstream psychology contributed to the war on Iraq, before and after 2003.

Thus, it is fair to conclude that critical psychologists paid very little attention to the war on Vietnam and the prevalence of militarism in mainstream psychology. Perhaps because of this negligent attitude, critical psychologists failed to pay attention to the war on Iraq, a politically decisive imperial campaign that clearly led to very serious consequences for Iraq, for the Middle East and the entire world. This general assessment holds even though there have been a few notable exceptions (e.g., Duckett, 2005).

Conclusion

The never-ending debate in the USA about the war on Vietnam seems to have had very little influence on mainstream psychology. The horrific and prolonged mass suffering inflicted on the people of Vietnam and in neighboring countries seems to have had very little significance for mainstream psychologists. In contrast, TSPE has had enormous recognition in social psychology and mainstream psychology across the world. Philip Zimbardo continues to be treated as a scientific genius in mainstream psychology and enjoys the status of a guru in human behavior some fifty years later. He continues to receive awards from professional organizations for his distinguished contributions to psychology.

This paper places TSPE in its historical context and casts a new and critical light on the study. TSPE was conducted in August 1971, at a time when the war on Vietnam was raging. By August 1971, the atrocities in Vietnam – including the My Lai massacre – were no secret. The Pentagon Papers had already been published. By August 1971, the king was very much naked. TSPE should be assessed in this context. First, it was funded by an institution that was clearly associated with wars and in particular with the ongoing horrific war in Vietnam. Second, Zimbardo seems to have made no effort at that time to link his scholarship and his work on the power of social settings to the atrocities

committed in Vietnam. Just as with many other exports, TSPE and its biases were exported as sound psychology to the Global South.

As a seasoned scholar, Zimbardo himself is aware of some of the lingering problems in mainstream psychology. He has pointed out the discrepancy between the greatness of common methodological tools and the smallness of the questions they are able to answer (Wargo, 2006). He has also urged psychologists to ask big questions, which is in line with the points laid out in this paper. It might indeed be appropriate to pose a few big questions that critical psychologists may hopefully follow up in the near future. Why is mainstream psychology still very silent about wars that lasted for decades, such as the war on Vietnam? Why has mainstream psychology been extremely negligent with regard to the immense suffering associated with the atomic massacres in Japan, or Napalm and Agent Orange? Why do psychologists in the Global South remain silent, when mainstream psychology in the Global North promotes militarism?

It might be appropriate to end this paper with a set of big questions brought up by the invasion of Ukraine. The invasion officially began on 24 February 2022 and has turned into a war with bitter consequences. Professional psychology organizations in the Global North, the very organizations that kept silent about the invasion of Afghanistan and Iraq, rushed to condemn the invasion of Ukraine. The British Psychological Society (BPS), for instance, released the following statement:

The developing conflict in Ukraine is deeply concerning for all, not least for those directly affected and who will feel the brunt of the psychological impact of the crisis and potential human rights violations.

We stand shoulder to shoulder with our colleagues in Ukraine in the face of aggression, and we are ready to draw on the collective expertise of our membership to provide any necessary psychological aid and human rights support during the crisis.

We believe in the values of freedom and democracy, and the role of psychology and psychologists in uniting and finding shared beliefs, over those that try to divide us.⁴

European Federation of Psychologists' Associations (EFPA), the body that represents the national organization of psychologists in Europe, also condemned the invasion and released a longer statement, which deserves quoting in full:

EFPA and its member associations strongly condemn the war started by the Russian government on the Ukrainian people. As the days pass the evidence mounts that this war causes unspeakable and intolerable human suffering.

EFPA views the war as a blatant violation of international law and human rights. It is against our core mission as enshrined in our statutes of shaping a humane society, building a European identity based on common values and goals, mutual respect and collaboration. It flies in the face of EFPA's goals to contribute to the quality of life of people living in Europe and to a democratic and prosperous

⁴ BPS responds to current conflict in Ukraine, <https://www.bps.org.uk/news/bps-responds-current-conflict-ukraine>, 25 February 2022. BPS also voted to support the rapid expulsion of the Russian Psychological Society from EFPA.

society. It contravenes the ethical principles in our meta code of respecting the fundamental rights, dignity and worth of all people; professional and scientific responsibilities to society; and maintaining the integrity that is the basis of psychology as a science and a helping profession. Peaceful collaboration on this basis is at the heart of the mission and vision of EFPA, and in turn the basis of membership of EFPA.⁵

The statement specifically described war as a blatant violation of international law and human rights, and also announced concrete action. The Russian Psychological Society was quickly expelled from EFPA on 3 March:

In the last few days, we have received many letters and statements from our member associations. This included a request from the National Psychological Association of Ukraine for the Russian Psychological Society to be excluded from EFPA. We have also received communications to EFPA from the Russian Psychological Society. As a result, an extra-ordinary Presidents' Council Meeting was held on Thursday, March 3, 2022.

Statements condemning the invasion were also released by various national organizations (e.g., Psychological Society of Ireland, Belgian Association of Psychological Science), international organizations (e.g., International Council of Psychologists) and various groups of mainstream psychologists. Most of these statements correctly identified war as a cause of immense suffering and also as a context where human rights were bound to be systematically violated. It is particularly noteworthy that these statements were released almost immediately: The BPS statement was released only a day after the invasion. The Belgian Association of Psychological Science released a statement on 28 February. The Psychological Society of Ireland followed on 4 March. Action was also very swift: The EFPA decision of expulsion was taken on 3 March.

Not surprisingly, APA also released a statement, immediately after the start of the invasion, and expressed solidarity with Ukraine. Even state associations, which are expected to remain silent on important issues, such as the Ohio Psychological Association, released statements.⁶ Just as with many of the statements mentioned above, these statements praised human rights, well-being, dignity and freedom. The short statement by APA also specifically mentioned that the military invasion of Ukraine threatened the people in surrounding nations.

None of these statements mentioned militarism as a threat to peace across the world. Nor did any of these statements mention other invasions, such as the invasion of Afghanistan. The statements by BPS and APA did not explain why the invasion of Ukraine deserved attention and concern, while the invasion of Iraq never did. In fact, none of the other statements contained a single hint

⁵ Statement from EFPA concerning the war in Ukraine and action in relation to the EFPA membership of the Russian Psychological Society, <https://www.efpa.eu/statement-efpa-concerning-war-ukraine-and-action-relation-efpa-membership-russian-psychological>, 3 March 2022.

⁶ OPA statement on the conflict in Ukraine, <https://ohpsych.org/news/597529/OPA-Statement-on-the-Conflict-in-Ukraine.htm>, 2 March 2022.

regarding concern with the invasion of Iraq or any hint of an explanation why other ongoing invasions around the world did not matter.

Only a few statements cared to distinguish between Putin's dictatorship and the people of the Russian Federation. Only a few statements mentioned the fact that war was detrimental for the millions living in the Russian Federation or expressed concern about their welfare. None of these statements included demands regarding the elimination of militarism and the structures that make wars inevitable. None included a demand for peace at all costs. It was very clear that organizations representing mainstream psychology had little understanding of politics and of peace-building.

Thus, mainstream psychology in the Global North missed a historic opportunity in 2022 to change course. Once again, it proved itself to be ahistorical. One after another, mainstream psychology organizations acted as if the invasion of Afghanistan had never happened, or as if the invasion had taken place in distant history. The truth is that the invasion of Afghanistan had officially ended only very recently, on 30 August 2021, less than six months before the invasion of Ukraine. The U.S. Armed Forces completed their withdrawal from Afghanistan and the withdrawal was in the media all across the world. The invasion was not a brief affair either: The occupation had lasted for 20 years.

Just like TSPE, mainstream psychology in the Global North has failed the political test. It appears important, at this juncture, for critical psychologists to press with a set of big questions: Why is the invasion of Ukraine more important than the invasions of Afghanistan and Iraq? Why is human suffering in Ukraine unacceptable, but suffering in Afghanistan or Iraq is perfectly negligible? If the Russian Psychological Society is complicit and therefore should be expelled from EFPA, why was BPS not expelled in 2003 after the invasion of Iraq? Why were other member organizations not expelled, when they did not object to their governments' decisions to send military personnel to join the occupation of Iraq?

This paper is a modest attempt to highlight an important and persistent political shortcoming of mainstream psychology. It has placed TSPE in its historical and political context, and provided a critical assessment of TSPE. However, TSPE is only one example of a persistent problem. The problem is obviously not unique to a single person's work or career, or to a single country or continent. The point is that mainstream psychology has a militarism problem.

This paper is also an invitation to psychologists, both mainstream and critical, to seriously consider wars and militarism in their work. In this vein, it might be a good idea to end this paper with a provocative question. Why did EFPA hold its 16th European Congress of Psychology in Moscow in July 2019 in collaboration with the Russian Psychological Society? At the time, the Russian Federation was under full control of the Putin regime, just as it was in 2022 and still is today. Why was this congress not boycotted by member organizations? If professional psychology organizations in the Global North and mainstream psychology as a whole want to be credible, they need to be able to offer credible explanations to their political failures in 1975, in 2015, in 2019, or in 2022.

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A reassessment of Tajfel's Social Identity Approach from a critical psychological perspective

Daniel Schnur

Abstract

Henri Tajfel's Social Identity Theory (SIT) grew out of criticism of the social psychological mainstream that emerged in the wake of the crisis of social psychology in the 60s' and 70s'. In contrast to prevailing assumptions at the time that the causes of social action were to be found intra- or interpersonally - i.e., the social only as a relationship between individuals - Tajfel stressed the importance of theorizing the social itself and individual action within it independently. He accused other approaches of individualistic reductionism. His theory grasps the action-guiding social identity in the dynamics between in- and out-groups. For many of the researchers referring to it, SIT represents a "critical" social psychology in the broadest sense, with which it should also be possible to grasp the psychological dynamics in the context of social change. From the perspective of German Critical psychology, the present text formulates central points of criticism of the social identity approach: (1) the untouched dichotomy between the social and the individual, which manifests a subdisciplinary split between a social-psychological and a general-psychological subject, (2) the model-like version of the social as an in-group/out-group constellation, (3) and, finally, inherent in the latter arguments, the different epistemological interests of the various works relying on Tajfel's legacy.

Keywords

social psychology, Critical Psychology, Social Identity Theory

Social Identity Theory (SIT) gained influence from the 1970s onwards and is now considered one of the "great theories" (Ellemers & Haslam, 2012) in social psychology. SIT originated as an attempt to explain the so-called "minimal group experiments" at the University of Bristol in the department of Henri Tajfel (Turner, 1996). It is also an answer to questions about the social context of individual action that were raised in the course of the "crisis of social psychology" in the 1960s and 1970s (Marvakis & Mentinis, 2014). At the same time, Critical Psychology (sometimes referred to as Berlin school or German critical psychology; in German: *Kritische Psychologie*), initiated largely by

Klaus Holzkamp, emerged at the *Freie Universität* in Berlin. Holzkamp criticized the dominant psychology of the time and started from similar premises as Tajfel. However, his scientific development was significantly different from Tajfel's and he arrived at fundamentally different categorical conclusions. In the discussion with Tajfel and the authors of SIT, it is striking that they do not arrive at a common conception with regard to the connection between the social and the individual, although it was precisely in the early days of SIT that the aim was to create clarity here on a paradigmatic level. As will be shown, this was already the case with Tajfel himself: In my opinion, a comparison of SIT with the perspective of critical psychology can illustrate this well. First, I will discuss the basic concepts, the context in which SIT emerged, and Tajfel's epistemological position. I then discuss central points of Tajfel's understanding of the connection between the social and the individual from a critical psychological perspective.

1. Basic Concepts of Social Identity Theory

Henri Tajfel formulated the SIT for the first time as part of his "minimal group studies." Tajfel, born in Poland, experienced the Second World War as a member of the French army and concealed his Jewish identity while a prisoner of war of the Germans. After the end of the war, through contacts with the British military administration in West Germany, he made his way to Great Britain, where he studied psychology and later became a professor. Early on, Tajfel took issue with US-style social psychology, accusing it of mechanistic modeling of individual behavior that could only inadequately explain the phenomena he researched, such as discrimination. He was of the opinion that the aim should be to explain collective similarities, not individual deviations. In debates about the "crisis of social psychology," he engaged in sometimes harsh polemics against the mainstream of (social) psychology at the time and called for the rethinking in the scientific community.

Tajfel noticed that social psychological laboratory studies revealed certain similarities in the behavior of test subjects, which, according to him, required their own theoretical concepts to explain. Tajfel's questions were as follows: How is the relationship of the individual to the social context to be understood? How do people form an image of their social environment and how do they search for meaning in it? And: What are the interactions between individual behavior and social context?

Tajfel formulated his concepts for the first time in concrete terms as an interpretative framework for his "minimal group studies" (Tajfel et al., 1971). The key question of the experiments was under what minimal conditions conflicts or intergroup discrimination occur between two experimental groups, i.e. different behavior towards members of an out-group and members of the in-group (Tajfel & Turner, 1979). Tajfel & Turner modeled a baseline condition under which it was expected that no intergroup behavior would occur: Subjects were randomly assigned to a group with no real meaning (e.g., group "X" and group "Y") and were then presented with a list of out-group and in-group

members (e.g., labeled member "4" in group "Y"). The task of the test subjects was now to attribute small fictitious amounts of money to the various individuals on the list. Tajfel and Turner expected that the money would be distributed relatively fairly between the fictitious individuals on the list, regardless of their group membership. However, they observed that even in this arrangement (where this was only indicated by a letter), there was discriminatory behavior towards the other group and preference for one's in-group. In contrast to the vacation camp study by Sherif et al. (1961), there was no conflict of interest between the groups in Tajfel and Turner's (1979) study; nevertheless, the experiment resulted in discriminatory behavior in their decisions by the subjects towards the other group. The mere social categorization - the perception of belonging to one group and not another - was sufficient to give rise to discriminatory behavior. Tajfel called this "in-group bias" or "in-group favoritism": the in-group is preferred, even if "fairness" would not mean a disadvantage. According to Tajfel and Turner, the in-group is concerned with maximizing the difference to the out-group.

On this basis, the authors formulate the theory of social identity: According to this theory, social groups represent a social way of understanding oneself. In this sense, Tajfel and Turner speak of social identity as those aspects of the individual's self-image that result from the social categories to which the individual feels he or she belongs (Tajfel & Turner, 1979). In the concept of social identity, they link the process of social categorization with the motivational basis of individual action: Individuals strive to maintain or improve their self-esteem. Social categories and membership in social groups are associated with positive or negative evaluations depending on the comparison with certain other groups. Consequently, social identity is negative or positive, depending on the evaluation of one's in-group. If the social identity is unsatisfactory, individuals may leave the group and look for a group that is more conducive to self-esteem. Alternatively, individuals can try to collectively improve the status of the group in relation to the relevant out-group.

Tajfel and Turner go on to ask themselves when individuals tend to orient their actions towards the social and when they tend not to do so. They postulate that social behavior can be mapped on a continuum between interpersonal and intergroup behavior. On the one end, one encounters an individual with his or her individual characteristics, i.e. only on the basis of an interindividual relationship. On the other end, one encounters a person only as a member of a foreign group, i.e. the relationship is primarily characterized by the fact that two group members interact with each other on the basis of (assumed/perceived) group characteristics. In reality, according to Tajfel and Turner, it rarely happens that social behavior is characterized by only one of the two extremes; rather, it is usually a position on a continuum. Their interest, however, is the question of the conditions under which social behavior approaches one of the two extremes. For Tajfel and Turner, the *conflict* between two groups is essential: The more intense it is, the more likely another person is to be regarded as a member of a group or social category and the more likely social behavior will approach the "intergroup extreme."

Tajfel and Turner claim to explain "ideological" conceptions of society by linking the continuum between interpersonal and intergroup extremes with a thesis on "belief systems": Accordingly, in the case of "social mobility," individuals believe that a change of their group membership is possible if their own group membership is experienced as unsatisfactory. If individuals have no experience of social mobility, they perceive the social system as so hierarchical or confrontational that the possibility of changing an unsatisfactory group membership is considered unlikely. Social change, i.e. a change in the group constellation, is considered desirable or even necessary in this case. Tajfel and Turner assume that the more widespread inequality in a society is, the more widespread the conviction of the need for social change is.

According to Tajfel and Turner, certain group constellations can lead to social identity being experienced as negative or threatened, but social mobility is not possible due to conflict of interests. They discuss three ways of dealing with belonging to a disadvantaged group. Firstly, one could try to leave the disadvantaged group through "individual mobility" and take off the identity, i.e. the feeling of belonging to the group. A second possibility is "social creativity," through which one tries to change the dimension of comparison with the privileged group in order to upgrade the disadvantaged group. And thirdly, there is the possibility of "social competition," i.e. the in-group tries to outperform the dominant out-group with regard to the relevant dimension of comparison, e.g. the fulfillment of social norms.

The basic concepts of SIT presented here already reveal Tajfel's fundamental criticism of the prevailing social psychological mainstream at the time. In contrast to the mainstream, Tajfel wants to understand the genuine social nature of the individual without assuming that behavior is unilaterally determined by circumstances. In addition, Tajfel attempts to explain how belief systems or ideological convictions can be linked to directly experienced social behavior.

2. Tajfel's Epistemological Position

The development of SIT took place against the backdrop of Tajfel's confrontation with the Allportian mainstream of social psychology at the time. This was particularly evident in his demand that social psychology should do more than examine the relationship between individuals. In particular, Tajfel accused the mainstream of his time of clinging to abstract individualism. According to Tajfel, social psychologists narrowed their perspective when they attributed ideas of individuals only to relationships between individuals (cf. Billig, 1996, 343). The complexity of the social behavioral context is not done justice if it is understood as a mere stimulus. One must begin by conceptualizing the context differently.

For Tajfel, the function of theories is to formulate guidelines for the interpretation of experimentally obtained data. Ultimately, these guidelines are assumptions about the behavior of people in relation to groups and to society as a whole ("society at large").

Turner says that Tajfel occupies an intermediate position between philosophy and atheoretical empiricism, from which he reflects on the social background of the behavior (Turner, 1996, 10). He does not place his own research in a historical-social context, which would probably also run counter to his understanding of science (Tajfel, 1979, 188). On the other hand, SIT is obviously not the result of a random idea in the ivory tower: Tajfel refers several times to the struggle of black Americans in his time to prove the social relevance of his ideas. Only by considering the possibility of social change can one arrive at a social psychology that is appropriate to reality. For him, the choice of research questions is also not random, but rather linked to social conditions and needs and to the relevant ideas and norms of the researchers. This is a central difference to the previously prevailing attitude that research questions and methods are neutral in relation to the social world. This difference has consequences for epistemology: "Instead of proceeding from the individual to the social, which produced reductionist explanations, we needed to start from an analysis of social functions to reach the individual ones." (Tajfel, cited in Turner, 1996, 14).

A key concept is that of the "social context" of behavior. For Tajfel, the "social" are group relationships; from the point of view of the individual, society appears as a group arrangement. Individuals are categorized by societal processes, the significance of which is reflected in individual actions aimed at maintaining or improving self-esteem. To investigate these processes, Tajfel, on the one hand, calls on social psychology to be interdisciplinary, while, on the other hand, he sharply distinguishes psychology from other disciplines:

'Social reality' can be described or analyzed in terms of socio-economic, historical or political structures. Such descriptions or analyses are not within the competence of the social psychologist. But he can ascertain that, for whatever reasons, the system of the relations between social groups is perceived by the individuals located in the various parts of the system as being capable or incapable of change, as being based on legitimate or illegitimate principles of social organization. (Tajfel, 1979, 187).

According to Tajfel, a special quality of individual behavior develops in social contexts, which can be seen, for example, in culturally learned norms: "Society, social structure are the natural environment of human behavior and social psychology's task was to relate psychological processes to that context" (ibid., 19). Tajfel's suggestion that society is more than the totality of social groups raises conceptual questions about the relationship between individual, group, and society. Tajfel merely argues that the intergroup relationships studied by social psychologists must somehow be placed in relation to the "macrosocial" context and can be examined in their "relatively autonomous" consequences by social psychology.

Tajfel sharply distinguishes himself from pure empiricism when he emphasizes the independent significance of theory; however, unlike critical psychology, for example, he does not consider the development of concepts as such empirically. The concepts of SIT merely have to be experimentally

falsifiable. However - and in my opinion this is a central epistemological problem of SIT - he argues that there are certain aspects of the relationship between the individual, group and society that cannot be investigated experimentally. These include numerous SIT assumptions, e.g. the link between self-esteem and group membership, which are based on theoretical assumptions. The same applies to Tajfel's equation of the social with intergroup relationships, the deduction of which is not empirically based.

Ultimately, Tajfel's epistemological position remains committed to experimentation as a method. He argues that the value of experiments depends on the "quality of the ideas tested"; the experiment itself is neither good nor bad, rather it depends on the quality of the hypotheses. One arrives at "trivial findings when guided by trivial ideas" (Tajfel, 1981a, 20). For him, the task of research remains the experimental acquisition of data, although these should be analyzed in the light of theories that do not necessarily have to come from psychology. "I do not believe that 'explanations' of social conflicts and social injustice can be mainly or primarily psychological" (Tajfel, 1981, 7).

Tajfel does not offer a broad methodological and conceptual critique of the Allportian type social psychology, but rather turns the then dominant individual-centered social psychology into a group-centered one. He does not claim to investigate how individuals behave in groups, but rather wants to show how group memberships are reflected in the individual and how group norms and beliefs influence the group behavior of individuals. In other words, his subject is the "group individual" or its behavior. However, he concedes that individuals also have a life outside the group; but this should be dealt with - for example - by general psychology or sociology (cf. Tajfel, 1979). Tajfel has no equivalent to the view of critical psychology, according to which the individual is a genuinely societal being, whose actions relate to sections of a society based on the division of labor: For him, there are only groups and the individual.

3. The "Double Tajfel": Critical Concepts and Methodological Conventions

It is noticeable in the literature that SIT and its further developments (e.g. Turner et al., 1987, Reicher et al., 2010) emphasize Tajfel's critical concern, but simultaneously use his concepts more as state-of-the-art experimental design and as an interpretation template. However, this contradiction was already inherent in Tajfel himself. Stroebe, a companion of Tajfel, writes about critical psychology:

Holzkamp's criticism seems to be quite similar to the objections raised against its individualistic approach by Moscovici, Steiner or Tajfel. [...] However, this similarity is only superficial. While we merely argued for more consideration of the social context in social psychological theorizing, the critical psychology arrives at a much more radical conclusion (Stroebe, 1980, 109f.).

In the face of critical psychology, one must self-critically admit that the context of the discussion of SIT has created a "homo socio-psychologicus" that is more reminiscent of "Frankenstein than the result of evolution" (Stroebe, 1980, 110). The fact that this concession did not lead to a change in the research program is due to the fact that Tajfel and the social psychology he criticizes have similar ideas about the object of research and method. Additionally, Tajfel is concerned with an experimentally based prediction of group behavior. Tajfel's critical stance therefore remains external to the method.

In contrast, Holzkamp does not want to apply critical standards to psychology "in retrospect," but rather starts his critique at the conceptualization stage. For critical psychology, the cognitive interest and goal is the (self-)enlightenment of people about the societal mediatedness of their action, combined with the question of whether and how the societal conditions can be changed.

Tajfel's approach was different: He saw the central problem of social psychology of his time primarily in theoretical individualism, which he no longer considered plausible against the background of the experience of fascism and his own biography. For Tajfel, there was never any question of leaving the methodological framework of the psychological mainstream. Laucken (1997, 247ff.) classifies three types of dealing with the "crisis of social psychology" in the 1970s: These are, firstly, immanent "improving" (e.g. better condition control in experiments); secondly, immanent "expanding" to include new concepts; thirdly, "transcending." Tajfel's approach can ideally be categorized as "expanding," i.e. he introduces new concepts without leaving the methodological framework. This can be seen, among other things, in the reception of his work, which is characterized by diverse debates on the question of what Tajfel "really meant" (cf. Condor, 1996, 286). Michael Billig, an early companion of Tajfel, criticizes the reception that separates Tajfel's empirical works such as the minimal group studies from his texts critical of empiricism - to Billig, both belong together (Billig, 1996). However, Billig does not discuss the question of why Tajfel, himself, never brought together his epistemological position and his research practice. He ultimately remained an experimental social psychologist who reflected on and criticized the restrictions of experimental social psychology along the way.

In this respect, it is understandable that two interpretations of SIT emerged from the debates about Tajfel's "true concern": On the one hand, the one that does not take note of Tajfel's numerous references to the relevance of interdisciplinarity and to the limitations of purely psychological explanations; on the other hand, the one that explicitly refers to the possibility of social change conceptualized in SIT and thus attempts to grasp the historicity of the social (Reicher, 2004, Drury & Reicher, 2009; for an overview, see Schnur, 2021). Many of those who refer to the second reading have accused others committed to the minimal group studies of having turned Tajfel's ideas into an individualistic social psychology (cf. Reicher et al., 2010; Wetherell, 1996). In particular, concepts such as collective empowerment and collective self-objectification (Drury & Reicher, 2009) offer starting points for critical-psychological questions.

However, this group of authors is not so much a scientific community in its own right; for example, it does not run its own journals or institutes. They merely insist on Tajfel's "critical" claims within the framework and community of SIT.

However, Reicher and Drury do not draw any methodological conclusions from the claim to a "more social social psychology" either: As for Tajfel, it is easy for them to criticize the relatively theory-poor formulations of others without focusing on their methodology. Here, too, theory in a way 'hovers' over the empirical data. Interpreting study results in terms of SIT is ultimately left to the individual decision of the researchers. Reicher and Drury's appeal to take Tajfel's entire work seriously repeats his "double track": A real connection between "criticism" and research practice does not succeed. Here, too, a methodologically grounded "outside view" of the subjects ultimately prevails. When, for example, climate activists are studied in Reicher and Drury's research context, their a field experiment has the police act in a certain way in order to then examine how the dynamics among the climate activists change (cf. Vestergren et al., 2018). The conditions under which the groups are formed, which groups there are, who is part of the experiment, etc. - all of this is set by the researchers. Thus, the actions of the group members are not interpreted as a special case of possible reference to the world, but as a reaction to conditions that were set from outside and cannot be influenced. The level of intersubjectivity between researchers and research subjects is excluded (for methodological reasons) and only brought in retrospectively through the interpretative framework of SIT.

4. A Critical-Psychological Perspective

While in critical psychology society is understood as the sum of the mediated relationships between individuals, i.e. society is based on collective and "average" activities (cf. Holzkamp, 1983, 233ff.), in SIT, despite Tajfel's claim, there is a dualism between the individual and the social. The groups exist before the individual joins them and is faced with the task of dealing with the consequences of belonging to the group. It remains unclear where the "social context" comes from.

In the phylogenetic deduction of the psychic, which Holzkamp (1983) executes in his *Foundation of Psychology*, groups only play a decisive role in the maintenance of life before the emergence of humans - for mutual communication, e.g. for food intake or warnings against predators (cf. Holzkamp, 1983, 114f.). With the production of tools and the division of labor, the societal process becomes increasingly autonomous, which, in turn, means that the existence of the individual or the reproduction of society is no longer directly dependent on individual activities or "contributions" (Holzkamp, 1986, 396f.). Social groups can be understood here as arrangements of meaning; For the acting individual, they represent possibilities and impediments to action mediated by society as a whole. Groups and the norms, ideas, etc. associated with them can therefore serve as a subjective orientation for action.

The "social identity" in Tajfel's sense could thus be understood as an experience that mediates between the significance of the group and the social position and situation of the subject - the contradictory nature of which is not taken into account in SIT. An example of the one-sidedness of SIT is its modeling of the motivational aspect of human action: SIT assumes that the pressure to evaluate one's in-group positively and thus increase one's own self-esteem leads to comparisons with the out-group. Critical psychology understands motivation as an aspect of agency and thus links it to the goal of (collectively) expanding the possessing of societal conditions (Holzkamp, 1983, 402ff.). It is therefore not necessarily about a comparison with a foreign group in which one must "come away" well, but about intervening in and participating in the social process. The idea of the world from the perspective of comparing one's own group is only one possible approach to the world.

In SIT, however, the "social context" (defined by groups) and society itself is one thing. It is only possible to describe action in the group because it remains open how the mediation between group and society is to be understood. The direct and purely situational (present) confrontation between two groups, which is necessary for SIT, makes the model abstract because groups, especially in the ideal-typical constellation of self and other groups, do not act in a vacuum. Due to its model-like character, the SIT interprets all possible subjective action orientations from the outset as part of social identity. Other possibilities are left out. Reicher and Drury (2009) supplement SIT with a perspective on "empowerment," which is to be achieved through social change, but, in my opinion, the basic problem remains: The direct confrontation between two groups is an example of a special situation, even if the representatives* of SIT declare it to be the normal case. Consequently, Reicher et al. (2010) speak of the group-based perception of the world corresponding to their reality.

The following studies cited as examples with reference to SIT take place in contexts in which a dichotomous group arrangement is given: For example, when Trump's supporters are examined during the US presidential election (Reicher & Haslam, 2017). The same applies to a study on the escalation of nationalism in the course of the Bosnian war (Elcheroth & Reicher, 2017, 183ff.), where the fact of the war created a friend-foe scheme, as well as to a study on the Scottish independence referendum, where the vote has only two options to choose from (ibid., 215ff.). However, the principle that one belongs either to one's own group or to a foreign group quickly reaches its limits: The emerging nationalisms that Reicher examines in connection with the disintegration of Yugoslavia cannot be understood exclusively on their own terms without, for example, understanding the function of the nation as a specific form of socialization. The concrete groups must ultimately be able to be placed in relation to society, otherwise there are only (manageable) groups, on the one hand, and an unmanageable and not conceptually comprehensible society, on the other. It remains unclear how the connection between group formation and social processes is to be understood.

However, the fact that groups must be mediated by society as a whole does not, conversely, mean that they are derived from the analysis of social conditions. What is essential is the question of the relationship between social structure,

individual group membership and subjective action. With Marvakis, society can be understood as a system "in which the individual subjects act with 'limited' insights due to the social division of labor" (1996, 126f.). From the subject's perspective, the social structure represents the totality of the framework conditions that enable and hinder certain actions (cf. *ibid.*, 128f.), e.g. through certain norms, institutions, but also social groups. Certain compromises between conflicting particular interests of collective subjects are solidified here. This is where concrete subjective action takes place - and even if it does not directly determine the overall social process, the social process is accelerated, delayed, and influenced by subjective action mediated by the meanings. In the examples cited above from SIT research, the conflict between identities -or even the assertion of one social identity at the expense of another- has no conceptual relationship to the overall social process. Ultimately, the concept of social identity in the sense of SIT limits subjective action to the respective group situation.

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On the omission of researchers' working conditions in the critique of science

Critique of neuroscience and the position of neuroscientists in economized academia

Eileen Wengemuth

Abstract

Neuroscience as a discipline of high relevance to psychology has been faced with a critique from various fields, including (critical) psychology, sociology, philosophy and neuroscience itself. Points of critique range from pointing out methodological flaws to the questioning of implicitly underlying philosophical or socio-theoretical assumptions. While the politicality of the debate around neuroscience as well as the potential political and societal implications of some neuroscientists' claims were often exposed as 'politics in neuroscience,' most of the critique omits another political aspect – that is, the dynamics and working conditions of researchers in economized academia. This article gives a brief overview of the different points of critique and then focuses on how neuroscientists position themselves in relation to these. It concludes that both the working and research conditions as well as different understandings of science need to be taken into account to understand the phenomenon of critique of neuroscience and neuroscientists' situatedness in it.

Keywords

Critique of neuroscience, interdisciplinary critique, neoliberal academia, economized academia, working and research conditions, science as practice

Introduction

When telling people that I was investigating the topic of the critique of neuroscience for my doctoral research project, I received a wide range of mixed reactions, which already gave a first hint at the political and academic dynamics around this subject matter. While some people were immediately overjoyed,

encouraged me as to the relevance of my topic and gave me suggestions on what literature to include, others were mildly taken aback and expressed puzzlement over whether this was a sufficiently relevant and specific phenomenon to investigate¹. Having majored in cognitive neuroscience, but at the same time being skeptical of some of the implicit assumptions made in neuroscientific research myself, it was exactly these dynamics that originally drew me to this topic and that I wanted to understand better.

In my doctoral research, I first conducted a literature analysis of the critique of neuroscience to give a systematic overview. To find out how neuroscientists position themselves towards these critiques, I then conducted qualitative expert interviews with neuroscientists. In the interviews, they were also asked what they *themselves* criticize about their discipline, thus offering them the opportunity to contribute further points of critique. In this article, I will mostly focus on the results of the expert interviews, but first give some examples of the critique of neuroscience found in the literature. It is important to point out that I conducted my interviews in Germany and in the UK and that in my literature analysis I included only texts available in English and German. It would thus need to be investigated whether similar results can be found in other contexts.

I would like to add another caveat before giving a brief overview of different points of critique. Neuroscience is a very broad and varied field with research topics and focuses ranging from physiological research on the opening and closing of ion channels to fMRI-studies investigating differences in activity patterns between different groups of people. In their analysis, many critics of neuroscience focus on selected, often popular scientific works, but then nevertheless formulate a general critique of the field of neuroscience. It would be an important task to investigate whether this is a problem or not and which points of critique apply only to specific subfields and which can be generalized. This was, however, beyond the scope of my thesis. I started with the finding that there is a remarkable amount of literature in which neuroscience is criticized, that 'critique of neuroscience' is thus a phenomenon worth investigating; consequently, I pragmatically included into my analysis any literature that calls itself 'critique of neuroscience.'

Literature analysis on critique of neuroscience

To give a systematic overview of different points of critique of neuroscience, I used a four-level-conceptualization from German-Nordic critical psychology (Holzkamp, 1983, p. 27-31). This conceptualization was introduced in early critical psychology to explain on which levels critical psychology criticizes mainstream academic psychology and to differentiate between different kinds and targets of critique. According to this conceptualization, points of critique are situated on different levels. The most basic one is the philosophical level, which deals with basic epistemological and ontological assumptions. At this level, fundamental questions are addressed, such as 'how I can know something with

¹ Needless to say that these reactions are the extremes and most were somewhere in between.

certainty' or 'what distinguishes scientific from non-scientific knowledge.' Here, critical psychology criticizes bourgeois psychology's understanding of science, which has no method for deriving and developing concepts, but often simply sets a definition.

Holzkamp considers the next level to be the socio-theoretical level, i.e. the level of an implicit or explicit understanding of society and of the relationship between individual and society. Ideology critique, for example, can be situated on this level. Specifically, critical psychology criticizes the "reduction of societal relations to direct social interaction" (Holzkamp, 1983 p.27, translation EW) as well as "the blind intellectual-methodical reproduction of the prevailing conditions" (ibid.). This means that the current form of society is seen as the only possible one due to a lack of reflection on societal relations. As a result, psychological scientific findings about human actions are not presented as findings about actions in specific societal conditions, but as general findings about human behaviour.

The categorical level - sometimes called paradigmatic - deals with the basic categories or concepts of a discipline, which determine its subject matter, i.e. with what this discipline is concerned. In critical psychology, basic concepts are called categories, which is where the name of this level comes from. One of the reasons why a critical examination of categories and basic concepts is important is that they often contain methodological assumptions as to how the subject matter can and should be researched scientifically.

On the basis of these basic concepts, assumptions about empirical data and their relationships are then explicated as theories on the next, single-theory level. The individual theories are not determined by the categorical definitions; rather, there can be different individual theories on the basis of the same basic categories, even to address the same empirical facts. For example, against the background of a shared understanding of scientific knowledge, society and the psyche, different theories about how mental health problems arise could be discussed. Which theory best describes a particular situation can then be empirically demonstrated.

Needless to say, this conceptualization is a bit oversimplifying and is not meant to be a description of different academic disciplines' scientific practice. Also, making use of this conceptualization does not posit the existence of ontologically distinct levels.

While keeping these restrictions in mind, I found it a helpful heuristic for systematizing different points of critique of neuroscience according to these levels. I will give a brief overview of these now. On a philosophical level, critique is, for example, directed at the psychophysical problem, which is a basic problem concerning the relationship between mental and physical – and in the case of neuroscience, usually neuronal – processes. Critics point out that while explicitly rejecting dualist mind-body-conceptualizations, neuroscientists implicitly fall back into Cartesian dualism by conceiving of the mind as an entity (e.g. Bennett & Hacker, 2003; Maier, 2015). Other philosophical critiques address epistemological problems, e.g. explanatory gaps or inconsistent conceptualizations of causality in neuroscientific research (e.g. Falkenburg,

2012).

On a socio-theoretical level, critical analyses address the ideological content (e.g. Malabou, 2003; Rose, 2012) of neuroscientific research, for example, that findings on neuronal plasticity can be interpreted as evidence that humans are able to -and can thus be asked to- flexibly adapt to any circumstances, which gives neoliberal capitalism its biological basis and justification. Critics also point out that neuroscience has a tendency towards naturalizing inequalities with respect to, for example, gender and race (Martinez Matteo, Cabaniz, Loebell & Krach, 2012; Schmitz & Höppner, 2014). Not surprisingly, the critique on this level addresses the potential political implications of the criticized neuroscientific research most explicitly. Critique directed at a lack of conceptual clarity, for instance, posits that terms such as 'consciousness' or 'representation,' which are vaguely and incoherently conceptualized, can be situated on a categorical level. Other critical analyses on this level address the attribution of human properties to the brain, such as 'brains making decisions,' which, as critics point out, can logically only be said of persons and thus constitutes a mereological fallacy (e.g. Gallagher, 2012; Crawford, 2008; Bennett & Hacker, 2003).

There are also many examples of a critique of methods, which address problems regarding statistical analysis, for example α -error-inflation due to multiple comparisons both in fMRI- as well as EEG-research (e.g. Vul, Harris, Winkielman & Pashler, 2009; Luck & Gaspelin, 2017). Critique of methods is – as is true for other academic disciplines – the most common form of intradisciplinary critique. Consequently, in this case, the critics are usually themselves neuroscientists.

Neuroscientists' positioning in relation to critique

The fact that neuroscience has been criticized a lot has led me to the question of how neuroscientists see these different points of critique, with which ones they agree or find relevant and what points they themselves would raise. I would argue that this is important for different reasons: In much of the critical literature, neuroscientists seem to be addressed as potential readers of the critique, presumably also because the authors assume they could change something about the criticized issues. Many critics aim to raise awareness of potential negative societal consequences of neuroscientific research, and it is thus relevant to reach and even convince people who could potentially change the way research is conducted. As I said above, much of the critique focuses on the writings of a few well-known neuroscientists, who have been very active in the media, and it is not clear -and thus worth investigating- how other neuroscientists see both the writings of these well-known representatives and the critiques of them. Finally, I believe it can be of general academic interest to better understand the reception of interdisciplinary critique or analyses of academic fields by other academic fields.

In order to investigate these questions, I conducted qualitative interviews

with 13 neuroscientists working in Germany and in the UK. To ensure my sample group is varied, I approached scientists from different neuroscientific subdisciplines, such as cognitive neuroscience, social neuroscience and computational neuroscience. Furthermore, the interview partners were at different stages of their academic careers, ranging from postdoctoral researchers to full professors. The interviews were conducted in German or English depending on the interviewees' preferences and took place either in their offices or – after the onset of the COVID-19-pandemic – in online meetings. To make sure that the interviewees were able to bring their own points of view into the interviews, I started each interview with the open question about which points of critique the interviewees have come across and how they thought about these. I kept this question that broad to allow the interviewees to bring up whatever their own understanding of the topic ‘critique of neuroscience’ was, be it critique of the whole field or of their own work. As I will describe later, it turned out that they brought forward issues under the headline ‘critique of neuroscience’ that were very different from what can be found in much of the interdisciplinary critique of neuroscience.

To ensure that the points of critique found in the literature were also addressed in the interviews, I used thematic cards with different points of critique as topics written on them. The interviews were audio-recorded and transcribed. For the analyses, I used a combination of Grounded Theory Methodology (e.g. Corbin & Strauss, 2008) and critical-psychological praxis research (e.g. Markard & Holzkamp, 1989). For the individual analysis steps, I followed Grounded Theory Methodology and used critical psychological methodological considerations as a reference frame throughout the process. A more detailed account of my methodology can be found in my thesis; here, I will illustrate my approach with the following example: In Grounded Theory Methodology, one technique for deriving concepts is asking questions about the data. This is well in line with what German critical psychologist Morus Markard suggests doing when analyzing interview data in absence of the interviewee, but still trying to maintain a level of intersubjective understanding. Namely, one should engage in a “simulated dialogue” (Markard, 2019, p.38) with the interviewee and ask what they could have meant by phrasing something a certain way and then build hypotheses about their reasons.²

First, I will show based on some examples of interview clips, how my interviewees positioned themselves in relation to different points of interdisciplinary critique that can be found in the literature. Some interviewees raised these points themselves; however, in most cases these topics were not discussed until after I had presented the cards. I selected the clips presented here to show as wide a spectrum of answers as possible.

On the topic of the *psychophysical problem* and critique of *implicit dualism*, one interviewee, a lecturer in cognitive neuroscience, states

² Following the critical-psychological principle of co-research, interviewees should be included in all steps of the research process as co-researchers. However, like many other critical-psychological researchers, aside from offering them to authorize the transcripts, I did not include the interviewees in the analysis. (See Wengemuth & Waleng, in press, for a discussion of problems in research practice when it comes to co-research.)

NW12: “we still don't understand how molecules contribute to consciousness or the mind.”
(NW12, 49)

Apparently, he assumes there is an explanatory or knowledge gap between physiological and mental processes, which neuroscientific research has not (yet) been able to close and thus agrees with critics pointing out this explanatory gap.

In contrast, another interviewee -who works both a researcher in affective neuroscience and as a psychotherapist-, when asked how her being a neuroscientist impacts upon her therapeutic work with depressed clients, is sure that

NW7: „negative thoughts (are) in principle only a specific constellation of neurotransmitters.”
(NW7, 48; translation EW)

She seems to understand negative thoughts as equivalent to -and potentially reducible to- neuronal processes. In other parts of the interview, she states that she sees mental and neuronal states as identical and that she uses this knowledge to explain to her clients why both psychotherapy as well as antidepressant medication are effective. She thus apparently does not assume there is an explanatory gap and does not agree with this point of critique.

The following two interview clips refer to critique on a socio-theoretical level. Addressing the point of critique of *naturalization of inequality*, with which he is familiar, one interviewee, a junior professor in cognitive neuroscience, describes his view as follows:

NW13: “Especially a lot of social scientists don't want to face the fact that there are also biological foundations of differences. Which doesn't mean that that can't change. But something like different educational success certainly also has biological foundations which we can't discuss away.”
(NW13, 39; translation EW)

The interviewee points out that just because something is biological, it is not necessarily unchangeable, possibly in response to oversimplified accounts of *nature vs. nurture*, which he has come across and which identify something being natural with it being unchangeable. Assuming that this point of critique is mostly raised by social scientists, he turns the critique back at them, stating that they refuse to admit the existence of biological foundations. By stating that social scientists – maybe due to their field's focus – refuse to admit the existence of biological foundations, I would argue he quickly wards off the critique without touching upon the potential societal consequences of naturalizing inequality.

In contrast, another interviewee, a professor in social neuroscience, brings up this topic as very important to him, even before the thematic cards were introduced into the interview. He speaks about how he, along with some colleagues, was concerned especially about implicit assumptions in the

subdiscipline of cultural neuroscience.

NW11: “We tried to find out, what are the questions and how are they addressed, in these cultural neurosciences? (...) And we thought, that has very problematic implications going in the direction of old race concepts even though the studies speak of culture. (...) And partly, we did assume that the authors were implicitly racist.”

(NW11, 6, 51; translation EW)

I hope these few interview clips give a first idea that there was a wide variety in how the interviewees positioned themselves towards critique of their field. There was no consensus among them on which points of critique are justified. Some strongly criticized (aspects of) neuroscientific research, whereas others found it unwarranted that neuroscience had been the object of much interdisciplinary critique. Apart from critique directed at statistical analysis, with which all interviewees were acquainted, there was a vast variety in their knowledge of other points of critique. Some interviewees had never come across many of the topics, whereas others had extensive knowledge. Several interviewees, irrespective of their individual stance towards the critique, stated that critique on a philosophical or socio-theoretical level -but also epistemological foundations- are not discussed in their daily research practice and that these critical analyses are not practically relevant for their work.³ I would argue that this practical irrelevance is corroborated by the fact that there was no consensus among the interviewees and that their familiarity with these topics varied greatly. If the discussion of basic philosophical and socio-theoretical assumptions played a role in the daily research, both a minimum consensus and a shared knowledge level would be needed.

How neuroscientists' understanding of science and their working and research conditions impact their position towards different points of critique

Over the course of the interviews, it turned out that the interviewees had different *individual understandings of science* and that these help to understand how the different interviewees think about different points of critique. By ‘individual understanding of science,’ a concept sometimes referred to as *personal epistemology* (e.g. Hofer, 2000) or *view on the nature of science* (e.g. Deng et al., 2011), I mean their implicit or explicit understanding of how one arrives at scientific knowledge. For instance, some interviewees expressed strong trust in the progress of science and saw science as independent from societal influences, whereas others emphasized the social embeddedness of scientific knowledge generation and questioned the primacy of knowledge from the natural sciences in relation to other disciplines.

One interviewee who generally sees a lot of problems in the way science is

³This does not mean that these points of critique are also theoretically irrelevant.

organized, expresses her strong trust that these problems will be remedied because neuroscience as a field will mature.

NW2: Consciousness science is a very young science. We've really just started. (...) I don't know what the way out is, but this is not a dead-end. We will get better. (**I:** Ok, so you have faith in the progress of science?) Absolutely, yeah. (...) We're babies playing in the mud. But we will grow. As babies do. (Both laugh) The criticism is true, it's valid. But we'll get over it. NW2, 109-112

She seems to be very sure that, no matter how problematic the conditions are now, there will be scientific progress and current problems will be solved.

Another interviewee, on the other hand, states that many neuroscientists do not question the data they collect. He contrasts this understanding with the understanding in the social sciences, which he described as having a more embedded view on data.

NW11: There is a prevailing trust in data in neuroscience, to say, data don't 'lie', they are just there (...). And this other view, maybe more from the social sciences, is to say, data are somehow embedded... have been collected in a certain context, with a certain research question, embedded in other phenomena of a certain time. (NW11, 12; translation EW)

This interviewee, himself, understands the data he collects as socially embedded and criticizes the predominant understanding of science in neuroscience.

Thus, the interviewees' understandings of science can be situated on a continuum between a more *naturalistic* understanding and a more *social-science-informed* understanding. I would argue that the individual understanding of science serves as a reference frame for *good scientific practice* and thus plays a role in how they see different points of critique.⁴ For example, interview partners with a more naturalistic understanding of science, who understand the scientific process as independent from societal influences, tended to disagree with philosophical and socio-theoretical critiques in particular or to see these critiques as irrelevant.

Irrespective of their individual understanding of science and their stance towards the critique that can be found in the literature, almost all interviewees strongly criticized their *working and research conditions*. For many of them, these were the most important points of critique, and they named this as their primary motivation for taking part in the interview. For example, they criticized the pressure to publish, which -in combination with short-term contracts- means that early-career-researchers, in particular, must generate publishable results in the short term to secure their next job. They also saw the bias towards positive-outcome papers as highly problematic, meaning that studies that have a positive

⁴ However, I am grateful to Morten Nissen for pointing out to me that this argumentation might follow too rationalistic a pattern and focus too much on what is said. While the interviewees probably want to put forward a coherent line of reasoning, it does not automatically follow that their practice is guided by the same logic.

outcome and/or confirm expectations have a higher chance of being published, while null result-studies usually remain unpublished and are not included in meta-analyses. Many also criticized the popularization of scientific knowledge, which has increasingly become a requirement for obtaining funding and often leads to the selection of research topics that can easily be summarized into short, catchy headlines, instead of complicated research endeavors that might or might not be finished successfully. Several interviewees also stated that the way scientific impact is defined in indices does not necessarily represent what they consider high-quality research. However, the number of publications and their impact levels play a crucial role in hiring practices.

I will again exemplify this with some interview clips. One interviewee recounts an incident in which a new colleague pointed out a flaw in an experimental setup, which limited the validity of the conclusions drawn from the experiment. However, since she needed to have a publication soon, the interviewee describes that it seemed not possible to change the experimental setup and to repeat the experiment.

NW2: (...) She had a very good point and we never thought about it in two years of doing this experiment. We have a problem. (Both laugh) And nevertheless, we have to publish, because... you know, it's two years of work! So we will discuss this, we will account for it, we will try our best, but we probably don't want to rerun the whole experiment saying "Oh, what happens if we change this other thing." Once we've reached our conclusions... (...)

I: You said: "But we still have to publish." Did you mean, for example, that you got some grants and now you have to show, ok, we did something with that money?

NW2: Not so much based on grant money, but in terms of career. (...) I need papers to get my next job.

(NW2, 34, 44)

In this interview clip, it becomes clear that the interviewee perceives her working and research conditions as not allowing her to work in a way that would meet her own standards of good science.

When speaking about the topic that neuroscience has sometimes been criticized for its broad claims, another interviewee draws a link to fixed-term contracts and the way scientific impact is defined.

NW9: We are working in a structure in which an increasing number of people are on third-party-funded positions, which are temporary. And one important criterion that decides who stays and who doesn't, is: who has published where? So journal impact factors. And publishing high impact often means: generalizing as much as possible in the interpretations and throwing as many limitations as possible overboard.

(NW9, 8; translation EW)

He argues here that the broad claims for which neuroscientists have been criticized also have to be understood as a way of getting one's article published in

a high impact journal and thus increasing one's chances for a next job.

The phenomena criticized by the interviewees are aspects of societal developments that are being characterized by sociologists as *economization of science* (e.g. Schimank, 2011), *neoliberal academia* (Smyth, 2017) or the *entrepreneurial university* (Etzkovitz, 2013). As such, they are by no means specific to neuroscience. However, as the German sociologist of science Torsten Voigt (formerly Torsten Heinemann) points out, neuroscience as an academic discipline is very well adapted to economized academia, both in the project-based way it is organized and with regard to the readily popularizable knowledge it produces (Heinemann, 2012). Consequently, neuroscience is very publicly visible and quite successful in the interdisciplinary competition for research funds. I would argue that for *individual neuroscientists*, their *discipline's* advantageous position might lead to even more competition.

More generally, I would like to make the case that the working and research conditions in economized academia are, on the one hand, an object of critique – as shown, for example, by the problems the interviewees report. On the other hand, the way academia is organized also provides (at least part of) an explanation of how neuroscientists position themselves towards different points of critique, especially for the relatively low reception and the low level of knowledge of many points of critique. Because of the pressure to generate a publishable result within a certain time, neuroscientists have little time to acquaint themselves with critiques of their discipline. As mentioned above, my interviews showed that many points of critique are not considered to be relevant to everyday research, so that dealing with these does not offer any advantages for a scientific career, let alone being a requirement. Their personal interest would therefore have to be strong for interviewees to give this discussion priority over other tasks or to devote their free time to it. A large part of the critique from the humanities and social sciences is published in the form of monographs, a form of publication that is unusual in the neurosciences and which many neuroscientists do not have time to read in their daily work.

To better understand the relatively low reception of many critiques, it is helpful to consider the two concepts – different understandings of science and the working and research conditions – combined and in relation to one another. In their analyses, many critics presuppose an understanding of science that is not prevalent among neuroscientists and was not even known to many interviewees. Theoretically and conceptually, these critics thus presuppose knowledge that neuroscientists often do not have. Neuroscientists would first have to acquire the basic assumptions and concepts used by the critics, before they can understand the critique. This is often unrealistic – although not impossible – due to the time and performance pressures they face.

Gaps and entanglements as characteristics of the phenomenon of critique of neuroscience

More broadly, I would argue that the phenomenon of the interdisciplinary

critique of neuroscience can be more adequately understood when taking into account the overall working and research conditions in economized academia as well as different understandings of science. Scholars who criticize neuroscientific research -and are not neuroscientists themselves- *also* work within an economized academic system characterized by competition for research funds between universities, disciplines and individual scientists, to which neuroscience is well adapted and thus comparatively successful. If, for example, the popularization of scientific knowledge in the neurosciences were less common, critics from other disciplines would probably not have taken note of these statements and would not have criticized them.

The success of neuroscience as a discipline can, on the one hand, motivate scholars from other fields to want to participate in it and to conduct neuroscientific research themselves, which can be seen in the many emerging neuro-hyphenated disciplines (Hasler, 2012 p.14 & Heinemann, 2012, p.119). On the other hand, this success may also make it subjectively functional for scientists from other disciplines to scrutinize neuroscience particularly critically and, through their critique, show the public, potential funders, and neuroscientists that the success of neuroscience, in terms of the quality of its findings, is not justified. I would assume that this is a particularly strong interest of humanities scholars and social scientists, who see themselves threatened by neuroscience in the competition for research funding, which is -at least partly- justified. In addition, criticizing a successful discipline – intentionally or not – may also let the critics partake in the attention that has been and is given to neuroscience. On the other hand, I would also assume that by seriously critiquing the attention-seeking statements of some neuroscientists, neuroscience as a field has received even more media attention, and critics may thus have unintentionally reinforced the "neuro-hype" (e.g. Grübler, 2017) they originally wanted to criticize.

In their critique, many – though not all – critics disregard the working and research conditions of neuroscientists and focus exclusively on neuroscientific – often popularized – knowledge.⁵

Many of my interviewees, on the other hand, focused their critique exclusively on the working and research conditions and were not familiar with the critique directed at neuroscientific research content and knowledge. Thus, there is a *mediation gap* in both directions. As a result of this gap, it remains unconsidered that many aspects criticized about neuroscientific knowledge are not independent of the working and research conditions in economized academia, in which this knowledge is generated. If we understand human agency as always social and political, we -as critical researchers- need to make sure to not only critically analyze knowledge and ideology, but also the economic-political structures in which this knowledge is produced -in the case of academic knowledge, the way universities and funding are organized- and to fight for better working conditions for researchers.

⁵ The insight that, to investigate and to critique science, it is not sufficient to look only at the generated scientific knowledge, but also to understand science as practice and labour, is by no means new (see for example Pickering, 1992 and Callard, 2022). However, a substantial part of the critical literature on neuroscience does not include this insight, often because they do not see it as relevant to talk to or engage with neuroscientists to understand neuroscience.

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Fostering democratic deficiency with climate action research

A tale of epistocracy, despotic truth tellers and useless laypeople in a time of climate change

Lise Isabella Meistrup¹

Abstract

Researchers hold a certain position in society, which enables us to competently hypothesize on the most favorable paths to pursue in specific matters. However, because of this privileged position, researchers also have a greater responsibility to exercise caution and acknowledge their limitations, when/if they make such suggestions. In this article, I argue that psychological researchers sometimes overstep this balance of caution with somewhat less finesse than what would be appropriate. More specifically, I argue that psychologists are at risk of contributing to a path that excludes the wider public from participating in matters of climate action – matters that require the participation of the public. I argue that this risk is particularly problematic for psychologists who work from a theory of human conduct, in which people are ontologically understood as competent participants in society, and I argue that while all research may be political, this is a point for caution and that researchers should be wary of intertwining scientific and political assessments.

Keywords

Climate action, democracy, theory of human conduct, laypeople

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Introduction

The customary complaints about democracy's ungovernability in the last instance come down to this: democracy is neither a society to be governed, nor a government of society, it is specifically this ungovernable on which every government must ultimately find out it is based. (Rancière, 2006, p. 49)

My aim in this article is to highlight why and how psychological researchers should resist their urge to propose too concrete solutions for political problems such as climate change mitigation.

I begin by arguing that climate change is a special kind of problem, a wicked problem that needs to be handled democratically. I argue that psychologists working from a theory of human conduct in which people are seen as competent participants in society will agree with this, because of said ontological assumption. However, drawing on Rancière and others, I argue that typical Western, democratic societies are sometimes rather leaning towards epistocracies, meaning that politicians and experts are effectively excluding the public from the decision-making processes of otherwise political matters. I give examples of this from psychological research on climate action.

I further argue that psychologists with a theory of human conduct where people are seen as competent participants in society should be particularly wary of this tendency to exclude laypeople from decision-making processes. I argue that a point for caution is when said researchers shift their aim from describing and revealing an existing reality to arguing what this reality needs in the future, as this is a political assessment rather than a scientific assessment.

Climate change requires democratic action – this is a known fact for those who believe it

In this first section, I argue, that climate change must be dealt with democratically. That is, with the inclusion of the public. I also argue, that this suggestion inevitably follows from a specific ontological onset that lays the ground for the researchers who make it.

Climate change is described as a *wicked problem* (Levin et al., 2012; Meistrup & Klitmøller, 2020; Sun & Yang, 2016), meaning a societal problem that cannot be solved with scientific knowledge due to the fundamental nature of the problem, which requires solution models that involve prioritizing between a number of intertwined solutions, none of which will ultimately be able to solve the problem due to the recurrent and ever-changing quality of the problem. Wicked problems are thus contrasted with *tame problems* with linear solution models (Rittel & Webber, 1973).

Similarly, Willis et al. (2022, p. 5) argue that it is useful to distinguish between technical and non-technical problems, with climate change being the latter: “In short, scientific and technical evidence can describe the problem, and offer options on how to respond, but it cannot make decisions on behalf of society”.

This is not to say that solving the problem of climate change does not require technical knowledge – on the contrary, Willis et al (2022, p. 5) continue:

Of course, scientific and technical input is an essential ingredient in any response to climate change. We cannot understand climate change without techniques of scientific observation, synthesis, modeling, and forecasting. Responses to the climate crisis, too, require understanding of different technical and technological options, such as the potential for uptake of renewable energy, or the feasibility of capturing and storing carbon dioxide. However, as has long been argued by scholars of science and technology studies, it is not simply a case of “translating” such evidence into action.

Willis et al., 2022 (p. 11) go on to argue that this process of translating technical knowledge into action is a political issue, and thus *more democracy* is the way forward (see also Willis (2020)):

As countries grapple with increasingly severe climate impacts and far-reaching cuts in greenhouse gas emissions, the climate crisis will come to dominate political thinking and action. Strengthening and enhancing democracy is an essential ingredient in rising to this challenge.

So, climate change is a democratic problem, or a political problem, either way, solving it requires the active involvement of the public, according to the above researchers. And their arguments may be sound, but I would argue that this solution is given by these researchers’ ontological understanding of human conduct. That is, for a critical psychologist, a pragmatist, a cultural-historical, activity theoretical psychologist, and the like², human conduct is based on participation. Therefore, participation must be the answer. This ontological premise is what Arendt (1998, p. 7) calls the *human condition of plurality*, meaning:

While all aspects of the human condition are somehow related to politics, this plurality is specifically the condition - not only the *conditio sine qua non*, [the condition absolutely necessary] but the *conditio per quam* [the condition that, if fulfilled, causes is] – of all political life

Thus, according to Arendt (1998), action in general, is the kind of human conduct concerned with our common lives, and this premise of shared participation is the basis for all political life, i.e. the life concerned with our

² I am not saying these theories are *the same*, however, they do share certain assumptions of conduct, which specifically distinguish them from so-called *mainstream psychological theories* and for this particular paper, I find them to be sufficiently alike for it to be more functional to treat them as one.

wishes for our future, our ideological beliefs about how to reach that future and the practical actions we partake in to get there. Being political and participating in *polis* is therefore, a constitutive part of human conduct – an argument with which Dewey agrees: “Regarded as an idea, democracy is not an alternative to other principles of associated life. It is the idea of community life itself” (Dewey, 2016, p. 175).

So, when we try to solve a problem like climate change, it is obviously a matter of political (and democratic) action because it revolves around the future we want for our common existence. For Arendt and Dewey, this is an ontological premise, not an ideological question.

Additionally, and more specifically in relation to climate change mitigation, critical psychologists, Rätzl and Uzzell (2019, pp. 1406-1407) also write how:

We are obviously not the first people to argue that change can only happen as a process from below in which people take control over their living conditions and thereby begin a process of changing their circumstances and changing themselves [...] Our argument is only that without recognizing and engaging the capacities of individuals for cooperation and a collective control of their living conditions a socially and environmentally sustainable world will not be possible.

Therefore, for many psychological subgroups of researchers, the statement that climate change should be handled democratically, meaning with the active involvement of the public, is little more than a reference to a fundamental aspect of human conduct concerning common problems of the future.

This point is not to say, however, that the statement ‘that climate change is a democratic problem’ is not valid or necessary. On the contrary, in the following section, I will argue that public participation is not something to be taken for granted.

Epistocracy disguised as democracy equals democratic deficiency

In the previous section, I argued that climate change (at least according to some researchers) requires democratic action. In this section I refer to a group of researchers who argue, that although most, Western societies, typically think of themselves as democracies they tend to be epistocracies, effectively excluding the public, while pretending to include them.

In their book, debating whether we need more or less democracy, Brennan and Landmore write that “Most people regard democracy as the best and most legitimate form of government” (Brennan & Landmore, 2021, p. 1). However, Brennan and Landmore (2021, pp. 1-2) continue, and write how “Even dictators claim to speak for and derive their authority from the people [...]”, and therefore, the statement that almost everyone seems to be in favor of democracy is no guarantee of actual public involvement.

The conundrum with people arguing for democracy while effectively repressing or suppressing or undermining it in practice illustrates a societal problem: Democracy is often taken for granted while the very constituting

elements of said democracy are undermining it from within. At least, this is the point in several papers and books, for example in Jacques Rancière's *Hatred of democracy* (Rancère, 2006), and with a particular focus on the use of merits in this pursuit in Michael Sandel's *The Tyranny of Merit* (Sandel, 2021). I find that Danish journalist, Rune Lykkeberg (2012), describes this twisted process the best in his book on the subject *Everyone is right. Democracy as principle and problem*:

It turns out that the very people, who use democracy as a slogan, are often the ones who work against it in practice. They assume that the majority is too immature and irresponsible to rule for themselves, and consequently the productive and enlightened must rule them. (Lykkeberg, 2012, p. 8, my translation)

Additionally, sociologist Ulrich Beck (2010) describes the phenomena specifically in relation to climate action: "The discourse on climate politics so far is an expert and elitist discourse in which peoples, societies, citizens, workers, voters and their interests, views and voices are very much neglected" (Beck, 2010, p. 254).

Thus, the theory is, that a small elite of scientists and politicians are forming an unholy unity, a kind of epistocracy, that subtly but firmly excludes the wider public from the decision-making processes. The elitist unity is formed and defended outwardly with reference to the before-mentioned merits:

[A]s the members of the government parties have done their studies in the same schools as those who are experts in managing the public interest, they tend to adopt the same solutions, giving precedence to the science of experts over the passions of the multitude (Rancère, 2006, p. 75).

In addition, Sandel (2021) argues, this constitution is often supported by those excluded from it:

They [elites] may denounce racism and sexism but are unapologetic about their negative attitudes toward the less-educated [...] this adverse judgment of the less-educated is not unique to elites; it is shared by the less-educated respondents themselves. This shows how deeply the meritocratic view of achievements has penetrated social life and how demoralizing it can be for those who do not go to college (Sandel, 2021, p. 96).

The exclusion of the public from the decision-making processes is problematic for several reasons, apart from the fact that it does not correspond with the ontological assumptions of people being competent participants in society. One of these reasons is that the merits are not transparent for those who do not hold them, i.e. "For most men, save the scientific workers, science is a mystery in the hands of initiates, who have become adepts in virtue of following ritualistic ceremonies from which the profane herd is excluded" (Dewey, 2016, p. 188). Thus, when decision-making power is delegated to a limited elite with reference

to merits, and these merits are not constituted in a transparent system for the wider public, that public is not only excluded from the decision-making processes, but is also effectively excluded from a position in which it could reasonably consider and question whether this delegation is preferable – therefore, the democratic constitution is weakened by a double exclusion of the public.

In the next section, I will show examples of how psychological research specifically on climate action can be seen as advocating the very same exclusion of the public in matters of climate action – thus fulfilling the diagnosis of democratic deficit caused by such research.

Examples of psychological research on climate action that supports the exclusion of the public

In the following section, I give examples of psychological researchers advocating for the exclusion of laypeople in public decision-making. However, my aim is not to point the finger at anyone in particular, because the problem I am trying to highlight is not specific to one or two researchers, but, I will argue via Lyotard and Dewey, inert to our position as researchers, where we are often asked: “then what” when presenting our findings as if such suggestions for future paths follow unproblematically from our research when this is usually not the case (e.g. Lyotard, 1984). Thus, my aim is not to empirically prove that psychologists endorse an exclusion of the public through their research, but rather to give examples of what it might look like when it happens because these examples will work as my point of departure for a future-oriented discussion about how this potential downfall can be overcome.

Generally speaking, my colleague, Jacob Klitmøller, and I have argued that mainstream research on individuals’ climate action often ignores the person’s perspective, i.e. the person’s history, motives and conflicting agendas in taking climate action (Meistrup & Klitmøller, in review). This means that, on a very basic level, people are not studied as people, but as instruments for a task that the researchers have decided on a priori (i.e. turning off the lights). Instead, the mainstream field of environmental psychology focuses on so-called *psychological barriers* as assumed reasons for the finding that people are often not acting according to the normative expectation – that is, reasons for why they are being such poor instruments for turning off the lights (Adams, 2021). For example, a commonly referred to ‘barrier’ to climate action is *lack of knowledge*. However, much research has shown that interventions aimed at informing people (canceling the barrier) often do not work and therefore, interventions are instead designed to surpass said barrier (e.g. Gifford, 2011).

One of the most transparent and radical uses of the public’s *lack of knowledge* comes from Jason Brennan who argues that “Citizens are ignorant, misinformed, and tribalistic despite lacking firm beliefs. As a result, the more power we give them, the more we suffer the consequences” (Brennan in Brennan & Landemore, 2021, p. 10), which is why he argues for overriding the public as a

constitutional right altogether (only letting those who pass some kind of test participate).

Often, though, the surpassing of the public happens more subtle, as in the case of *paternalism* which refers to nudging and behavioral design (Thaler & Sunstein, 2021). Either way, though, these strategies are designed to bypass the public's decision-making processes, i.e. Goodwin (2012, p. 85) writes that "the use of 'nudge' tactics in UK policymaking ought to be rejected. Nudge contravenes the coalition government's aspirations to promote ideas such as empowerment, freedom and fairness".

However, not all psychologists will agree with the aforementioned ontological assumptions, about people being competent participants in society, and therefore, these theoretical positions may fully and transparently *not* endorse democracy as a solution model. For instance, Brennan and Freiman (2022) argue how theories in favor of paternalism essentially must also be in favor of epistocracy, because the internal logic is parallel in the two belief systems – people are incapable of deciding what is best for themselves and therefore someone else must decide for them. This means that the argument that psychological theories may exclude laypeople's perspectives on public climate action is not a critique to these theories – at least not an internal critique, since there is internal consistency between the ontological assumptions of human conduct in these theories and their proposed solution models, which advocate the exclusion of laypeople. An external critique is of course valid, but not the aim of this article (see Meistrup & Klitmøller, 2020).

What is more problematic is if psychologists who believe in their research subjects as competent participants also lean towards the less democratic solution models. The problem is that such bypassing of the public is fundamentally incompatible with these theories' perspective on human conduct, and therefore these theories would show a lack of internal validity if participating in excluding the public (in addition to excluding the public). Therefore, such psychologists have a greater responsibility to avoid this.

Personally, I research people's climate actions, and I often find myself *driven* to research and understand the most effective actions, speaking from an environmental perspective, rather than the mundane and ineffective actions that seem to absorb my research subjects (like switching to bamboo toothbrushes). However, deciding what are the most effective actions for mitigating climate change is not a factual, neutral, or *certain* matter. As noted above, climate change is not a technical problem. Thus, some would argue that individuals' climate actions should be studied whenever they act as participants in democracy, and some would argue that individuals' role in climate change is primarily as consumers, so I should study specific pro-environmental (consumption) behaviors. Choosing which solution to focus on is as much an ideological judgement as a scientific one and therefore this is the exact time to be especially cautious as a researcher, not to exclude one's subjects (the laypeople of society). I will unfold this argument in the following.

The importance of our perception of ‘the other’

In the previous section, I argued that a time for caution is whenever researchers move from describing what is, to hypothesizing about what should be. Dewey describes this same shift as a historical change in our perception of what counts as scientific knowledge:

In short, there is a change from knowing as an esthetic enjoyment of the properties of nature regarded as a work of divine art, to knowing as a means of secular control – that is, a method of purposefully introducing changes which will alter the direction of the course of events (Dewey, 2008, p. 81).

Thus, following this change, rather than aiming at understanding, research becomes the process of gaining control. Dewey writes the above in his book *The quest for certainty*, where he argues that in response to living in an uncertain world, people behave in a counter-manner, constantly seeking for certainty as a way of escaping “the peril of evils” (Dewey, 2008, p. 7). However, working from an ontology of constant change, such certainty is simply not a possible endeavor, hence:

We are unable to show that the ideals, values and meanings which the philosophy we nominally hold places in another world, are capable of characterizing in a concrete form, with some measure of security, the world in which we live, that of our actual experience (Dewey, 2008, p. 63).

Thus, the research as an art of control is not descriptive of the life we live. Instead, as in the example of my own research subjects who are more concerned with their bamboo toothbrushes than with revolutionizing the system, Dewey describes how people are, indeed “frenetically absorbed in mundane affairs in ways which, if they were formulated for intellectual acceptance, would be repudiated as low and unworthy” (Dewey, 2008, p. 62).

Therefore, if people are not already mitigating climate change in the *certain* way that we, as researchers, believe the problem should be solved, and we in turn prescribe a *certain* path forward, recommending it with the authority our positions grant us, maybe even on a legislative level, we run the risk of overlooking the “mundane affairs” that absorb them, in order to gain control with a process that should be uncontrollable, and thus, we risk excluding the laypeople and their lived experience from the process altogether.

Additionally, Løgstrup argued that a fundamental aspect of human conduct was our interdependence – our mutual and undeniable dependence on others (Løgstrup, 2014). Where I have argued that excluding the public is a democratic problem, and perhaps a problem of internal, theoretical validity, Løgstrup rather argues that the problem with excluding the other is that even if we reach the future we set ourselves up to reach, that future would only be a perversion of what it should have been (Løgstrup, 2014). Staying with the example, we can imagine a world where people might consume plant-based foods, but only do so because these products were the most accessible to them – placed right in eyes

sight in the supermarket, not because they understood the environmental benefits of doing so. They would be headless soldiers, not educated adults and to some of us, that matters.

Thus, we are a group of psychological researchers, who believe that our research subjects are competent participants in society, and we who share these ontological assumptions, face a potential struggle, when trying to endorse (certain) solutions while remaining true to our ontological assumptions, including *the human condition of plurality and interdependence*. This is somewhat old news for most of us, but it is still a tricky endeavor and one that we should be constantly aware of. Therefore, in the next section, I will suggest a concrete focus for researchers concerned with this potential problem.

Beware of subtle intertwinement of research and politics – using Arendt for guidance

Following on the previous sections, I will use Arendt to argue, that it is wise, as a researcher, to be cautious about the intertwining of research and politics – that is when researchers move from describing society to suggesting ways of changing and controlling it because this particular event marks the point where researchers risk excluding the public from their agenda.

According to Arendt, when researchers advocate a particular course of action (even if that course is chosen with reference to facts), they overstep their role as researchers because, according to Arendt, the role of researchers is to establish facts – essentially to tell truths. Politicians, on the other hand, tell people what to make of these facts, i.e. what they should mean, based not only on the facts but also on the ideological convictions about what kind of world they want and how they think we, as a society, will achieve it (Arendt, 2005).

An introductory, disclaiming note on Arendt is probably in order, as Arendt's theory of scientific knowledge is sometimes a little unclear (see also Burdman, 2018). Following the above distinction in which researchers are positioned as society's truth-tellers, it would seem like Arendt has a positivistic view of science – however, similar to Lyotard (1984) in *The postmodern condition*, Arendt describes what she think science is legitimized by, i.e. stating facts and telling truths, as opposed to prescribing what she think science should be. So Arendt is not telling us that this is how she thinks it *should* be; she is merely describing how most science in practice is legitimized.

Moving on, what happens in the above-mentioned examples is that instead of stating facts such as *all psychological research is political*, the researchers act as politicians themselves, arguing for a particular future being the most favorable. In this shift, they overstep their role as scientists and this is problematic because researchers as society's truth-tellers, do not engage in debates on the same premises as politicians (or other political members of polis, the public). Burdman (2018, p. 491) on Arendt, describes this incompatibility between scientific and political communication as follows:

Arendt (2006) defines truth as a "mode of asserting validity" [...], which is distinguished from opinion. Independently of its specific content, this mode of assertion is inherently in conflict with the public realm. The reason is that it is coercive rather than persuasive, in the sense that it is beyond agreement and dispute.

Therefore, Arendt (2005, p. 302) even goes on to say that "a commitment even to factual truth is felt to be an anti-political attitude", and that "the scientist qua scientist does not even care about the survival of the human race on earth or, for that matter, about the survival of the planet itself" (Arendt in Burdman, 2018, p. 488), thus meaning that being a scientist is in every way detrimental to being political.

In order to understand why the political sphere and the scientific spheres, according to Arendt, are so detrimental, I will explain these two spheres in more detail. The sphere of political life is different from the sphere of scientific life, because science, as already stated, is about establishing facts, and facts can only be factual in retrospect – facts concern the *past*. Whereas political life is about ideas, ideologies, and actions to achieve a specific, desired *future*. Additionally, political life is concerned with *opinions*, and opinions are asserted through words and discussions – persuasion rather than facts and coercion (Arendt, 2005).

Therefore, according to Arendt, researchers who transgress their role as truth-tellers become as dubious as the politician who argues that his ideology is a matter of facts. Because researchers have this special role as society's truth-tellers, their transgression becomes particularly problematic, because their typical mode of asserting validity effectively impedes debate. For example, even though researchers might agree that neither green growth nor technological fixes are likely to be a sustainable solution to climate change (e.g. Stuart et al., 2020), some people may still *want* to focus on them – despite being aware of the risk of failure. Because we do not yet know the future, no one can say with certainty that their focus is wrong or invalid, because this is a matter of opinion and ideology, a matter of taking action rather than stating facts. What can be said is that on current assumptions, green technology is unlikely to make enough of a difference to avoid certain consequences. However, judging whether these consequences should be avoided and at which cost is a matter of ethical, not factual, arguments, and therefore such matters must be dealt with as a political issue, not with quiet coercion as in the cases where the public is excluded altogether.

I will argue that the division between science and politics is not watertight. Burdman argues that Arendt did not either (Burdman, 2018) and that the distinction is primarily, as I will use it here, a call for caution. Furthermore, Walsh writes:

Arendt has always resisted classification within any particular discipline. She resolutely refused the title of 'philosopher' throughout her life, preferring the label of 'political theorist' (Arendt, 1994: 2), and is regarded primarily this way today, as a theorist whose main contributions feed into contemporary debates (Walsh, 2011, p. 121).

Thus, Arendt did not let herself be reduced to a mere truth-teller, and I suspect that neither should we. In fact, for researchers who believe people to be competent participants in society, science and politics must inevitably be intertwined, as this assumption implies for themselves as well.

So, my aim is not to separate research and politics, describing past and arguing for a different future. Rather, I hope that those researchers who do overstep the scientific sphere and enter the political will be even more aware of their own role when doing so – so that they do not (inadvertently) exclude the public along the way. If they are not careful, they risk bringing a despotic mode of asserting validity into a realm that must remain open to debate. They risk undermining the public's opinion and ability to participate democratically, and at least some of us find that very worrying.

Summary

In this article, I have argued that climate change is a wicked problem and that such problems must be handled democratically. I have argued that this is an ontological premise for all psychologists who hold the assumption that people are competent participants in society. I referred to Rancière and others who argues that typical, Western democracies are showing democratic deficiencies, tending towards epistocracies, in particular by excluding the public from decision-making processes; and I showed that psychological researchers sometimes contribute to this exclusion. With these examples, I hope to have elicited the phenomenological nod from researchers who, like me, sometimes feel the urge to solve the problem and to suggest concrete ways forward, while at the same time holding the conviction that the problem is not for me alone to solve. Acknowledging that the public and the other, as Rancière, Dewey, and Løgstrup say, are just that, because they are not me and they are not mine to control. Finally, I suggest, via Arendt, that researchers who wish to avoid this potential exclusion, can focus on the times when they move from being researchers stating facts, i.e. describing what is, to sharing (qualified) hypotheses for future paths, because, with this event should follow a shift in these researchers' mode of asserting validity and if this does not happen, these researchers risk bringing a despotic mode into a democratic one.

Thus, researchers in climate action must 1) avoid the exclusion of laypeople from decision-making processes in general, i.e. focus on illuminating their perspectives (motives, experiences, etc.) and communicate findings to the public to enable them to participate even more qualified; and 2) avoid the potentially despotic character of researchers who argue for specific solutions as if these were the only ones – i.e. be aware of the limitations that follow from going from stating facts and describing the past to making hypotheses about the future based on selected facts.

Although the path to a sustainable future in which we are able to keep the wicked problem of climate change in check may seem immensely distant if we are to follow the democratic path, at least for some of us, due to ontological

assumptions about our own and others actions, we have no other choice. Not because democracy is a certain solution for climate change mitigation, but because democracy *is* being in a world that includes others.

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Participatory Research with the Margins: Learnings with youth and children about the importance of inventiveness in peripheral contexts in Northeast Brazil

James Ferreira Moura Jr, Érica Atem Gonçalves de Araújo Costa & João Paulo Pereira Barros

Abstract

We aim to analyze the importance of the inventiveness of participatory research with children and adolescents in marginal peripheral contexts in two cities in the Northeast of Brazil. First, we present the differences between center-periphery-margin conceptions in knowledge production. We understand that the coloniality of power spatially situates people who live through historical processes of dehumanization, such as women, children, youth, poor, black, and indigenous people. Thus, we understand that knowledge production is developed by these centers of power that reproduce these hierarchies. Participatory Action Research can be a strategy to displace this knowledge production to the margins. We understand that ethnography, radical solidarity, and following the inventive processes of resistance developed by children and adolescents in the peripheries can be good strategies to displace this knowledge production. We exemplify our understanding of Participatory Action Research with an inventive focus on children and adolescents through our experiences in our research groups: Research Network on Poverty, Discrimination and Resistance (REAPODERE) and Research and Intervention Group on Violence, Social Exclusion and Subjectivation (VIESES).

Keywords

participatory research, margin, children, youth, Global South

Introduction

We understand the matrices of domination responsible for the erasure of specific subjects - black people, women, the poor, children, young people, and homosexuals (Moura, Sonn, Serrano Garcia, & Ortiz-Torres, 2022). They have

systematically removed from them the possibility of having their voices heard and their knowledge recognized (epistemicide and colonial practice) (Mignolo, 2017). There are populations living, in their majority, in urban and/or rural regions marked by high rates of violence (Borges & Cano, 2017), poverty, and discrimination (Almeida, 2019). There is a line that separates the majority of the population that is located on the margins from a small group of privileged people. This line is the same line that divided the colony from the metropolis during colonization. Souza (2019) calls the abyssal line the one that separates the world into Global South and Global North. Below this line is the predominance of the dehumanization of human beings and the intensification of violence against women (Ballestrin, 2021), people of color (Almeida, 2019), children and youth, and groups with dissident sexuality, among others. We realize that this line does not separate only countries that were maintainers of the hierarchies of colonialism. We understand that this abyssal line is present in any center-periphery relationship. The center can mean the location of economic, political, and cultural power in any institution, city, country, or region, structurally maintaining coloniality (Castro-Gómez, 2005). Thus, we understand that in the center, the coloniality of power can reign more hegemonic since there is a white, masculine, elitist, capacist, and cisgender normative structure configuring a concrete space of coloniality of being. This coloniality of power and being is totally intertwined with the coloniality of knowledge (Quijano, 2005). In this way, the center reproduces and employs stigmatizing understandings of the people present in the peripheries.

In Brazil, the outskirts of cities are predominantly made up of poor people, black and indigenous people, women (Carneiro, 2011), groups with dissident sexuality (Adaïd, 2016), and people with disabilities. Milton Santos (1997) states that the reproduction of inequalities present in society's very structure permeates a city's geographic and population structure. In this way, the concept of periphery should be understood as a geographical and social concept situated on the margins of the urban centers of power. Most people of the world are situated outside the centers of economic, political, and cultural power (Bulhan, 2015). They are positioned on these margins. According to Goffman (1982), groups situated on these margins are stigmatized. Stereotypes and stigmas can be differentiated through the groups that individuals make up. However, we note that there is the same stigma for women, black people, children, and the poor: people are recognized as less intelligent from this intersection of the coloniality of power-being-knowledge. Despite these stigmas, we have historically researched these groups situated in the margins. We have found people with inventive resistance strategies to deal with violence, death, prejudice, and stigma daily. Community-based Participatory Action Research is the primary strategy for strengthening resistance practices developed at the margins (Dutta, Sonn, & Lykes, 2016). In this sense, we aimed to analyze the importance of the inventiveness of participatory research with children and adolescents in marginal peripheral contexts in two cities in Northeast Brazil. In the first topic, we perform a brief genealogy of the modes of production of Western scientific knowledge, explaining how it rose as a hegemonic discourse that occurred in line with the

delegitimization of certain groups capable of producing knowledge. In the second section, we show how the problematization of these matrices of domination is materialized in the design of ethnographies with young people in the peripheral context, moving researchers and research participants through inventive and procedural paths. In the final considerations, we reaffirm the ethical-aesthetic and political character of research in Psychology.

The place of the peripheries and the margins in knowledge production

In its hegemonic rationality, science's process of "development" has historically positioned certain social groups on the margins. The production of scientific knowledge was created from colonial bases. Before colonization, knowledge had an organic relationship with the world (Castro-Gomez, 2007). However, to René Descartes, in "Discourse of Method" and "Metaphysical Meditations" (2005), knowledge only becomes valid with the distancing of the subject of knowledge from the object to be known. In this way, the Ego Cogito, "I think, therefore I am", becomes central in Science and Western Societies. However, from a critical perspective of coloniality, we understand that scientific rationality based on solipsism and ontological dualism is an epistemicide (Grosfoguel, 2016).

The mind-body separation is based on erasing the location of individuals in their territories, prioritizing the idea of the superiority of the mind. Thus, knowledge creation would come from a solipsistic perspective as an inner monologue in which the producer of knowledge inquires himself and finds his answer (Grosfoguel, 2016). As bound to rationality, the mind functions as the idea of a Christian "eye of God", omniscient and omnipresent, which is not located anywhere but has the power of observation, domination, and control of one's body nature (Castro-Gomez, 2007).

Without these ideas of mind-body separation and solipsism, there could be no conception of the production of universal knowledge because it is territorialized, embodied, genderized, and racialized (Haraway, 1988). This definition of scientific knowledge as universal aims to invisibilize the ideological construction of modern Western knowledge by white men with a Eurocentric bias, referencing an epistemic superiority to certain territories and identity markers (Grosfoguel, 2016).

Spivak (2010) denotes that identity markers are ideologically recognized as incapable of producing knowledge, located in the body of women, the black population, third-world countries, individuals in the peripheries, young people, and other social groups. In an intersectional way, this process of subalternization of knowledge and dehumanization would be concretized in the body of black peripheral third-world women (Brah, 2006). Intersectionality functions as a prism for understanding the articulated matrices of domination (Crenshaw, 2002). The origin of the dehumanization of these identity markers lies in constructing the centrality of the Ego-Cogito in Western Science and society. According to Quijano (2005), with colonization and the creation of the idea of America, the world underwent a global transformation with the cognitive structuring of society

into a modern colonial world with a valorative base of the heterosexual European white man. This structure emerged from creating the idea of race and racism that, before colonization, was non-existent globally.

The legitimization of the genocide and enslavement of the black population of the African continent and indigenous people of the Americas was necessary to create the idea of the superiority of the white European race (Grosfoguel, 2016). The indigenous and black races were positioned as inferior and underdeveloped that needed to be colonized. Thus, for the emergence of the "I think; therefore I am," there had to be the "I conquer; therefore I am". However, this conquest was only possible with the "Extermination; therefore I am" which was the basis of colonization with the idea that people without the religion of the colonizers, such as the black African population and the indigenous people, came to be seen as people without soul that could be enslaved, catechized and murdered (Grosfoguel, 2016).

However, this conquest and extermination are still constitutive of Western societies based on coloniality. Quijano (2005) conceives a colonial-based pattern configuring a cognitive system of societies, situating whiteness, masculinity, the North, heteronormativity, wealth, and adultism as superior. Since science is a constituent of society, according to Spivak (2010), there is a delegitimization of knowledge produced by young people, women, black people, the periphery, and the third world. The structures of universities are also based on this process of hierarchization of expertise, not recognizing knowledge in the margins (Castro-Gomez, 2010).

Santos (2010) understands that science has a sexist, classist, and racist structure, which has used the fallacy of neutrality to legitimize historical inequalities. Thus, it is necessary to foster guidelines in knowledge production and investigations based on the plurality of cosmovision. According to Grosfoguel (2016), rational scientific knowledge is hugely provincial, situated from the ideas of a few men from countries in the Global North. Alcoff (2016) points out that we must have a normative horizon based on social justice and against these colonial premises. Thus, Santos (2011) points out that the sociology of emergences and absences should guide knowledge production. These refer to the invisibilities present in the production of knowledge.

According to Dantas, Oliveira, and Yamamoto (2010), the scientific productions of Psychology in Brazil have denied the context of poverty as central in developing their investigations. Moreover, the conditions of poverty and vulnerability can also be seen as an emergent phenomenon because, in third-world territories, such as Brazilian, the structure of society is based on the death of marginalized bodies not seen as human (Mbembe, 2017). In this case, the poor, black people, young children, women, homosexuals, and trans people are not recognized as human beings. Therefore, they are not centrally present in knowledge production but have historically been discriminated against, violated, and murdered. Dussel (1977) brings up the need for the displays of knowledge to be made with these people in the margins in a radical sense from the otherness.

Marginalizing the research: Learnings with experiences with children and youth in Ceara

In this article, we analyze the specificities of research in peripheral contexts under the inspiration of studies in thematic fields that intersect: poverty, peripheral childhood, youth, violence, and resistance. From this encounter, we understand there is a way to do participatory research with these mostly black youth and children in poverty in the Global South in the Northeast of Brazil. We, the authors of this article, also come from peripheral contexts in our youth and childhoods. We know in our way the power of monetary deprivation, class prejudice, and the significant presence of violence in our communities. However, we understand that we also have privileges because we are white. Thus, we have not suffered racism in our trajectories. I, Erica, suffered sexist discrimination for being a woman, feeling the weight of patriarchy in my trajectory to become a university professor. When we reached these positions as professors, we started intervention projects and participant action research in the peripheries located in the cities of our universities. The Federal University of Ceara is located in Fortaleza, the capital of the state of Ceara, in Northeast Brazil. The Universidade da Integração Internacional da Lusofonia Afro-Brasileira is located in the cities of Redenção and Acarape in the interior of the same state. Both universities are public and free of charge, supporting intervention projects that we call university extension and participant action research projects. However, despite this institutional support, few professors decide to carry out activities on the outskirts of our cities.

Thus, we materialized this article through exchanges within the two research and extension groups that we coordinate: Group of Research and Interventions on Violence, Social Exclusion and Subjectivation (VIESES) and Network of Studies and Confrontations of Poverty, Discriminations, and Resistances (reaPODERE). Currently, VIESES is carrying out Participatory Action Research on articulating social practices related to the problem of urban violence involving segments of children and youth in areas of the city with high homicide rates. The Rede de Estudos e Afrontamentos das Pobrezas, Discriminações e resistências works with black children in poverty to develop processes of empowering these children to confront racism, classism, and adultism in a rural town called Acarape. We will share our experiences with this participatory research with children and youth situated in these city margins. Participatory Action Research is a way to produce knowledge with people in their territories from their concrete demands (Fals Borda, 2013).

The basis of our participatory action research is ethnography. We understand that ethnography allows us to be in the peripheral territories of children and adolescents in a more integral way. To act communally, we must be presentially with people in their territories, experiencing the local dynamics (Gois, 2005, 2008). In this sense, we (professors, undergraduate, and graduate students) leave our universities to be face-to-face with the children and young people who live on the margins of our cities. The VIESES team goes by bus to the city of Fortaleza's poor areas to conduct the action research activities with

young people. The REAPODERE team works in a small town in a rural context. So they walk to the community of Estrada Velha where the children live. It takes them 30 minutes to walk to reach this peripheral territory. So the ethnographic approach starts when we leave the university to do the activities with the youth and the children. Other teachers and students sometimes ask us where we are going. We answer that we will carry out the action research activities in the peripheral communities of the youth and children. They usually respond that we are crazy to go to these territories and will be robbed. The coloniality of power, knowledge, and being operates in the format of prejudiced talk from colleagues and students in our universities because our universities are still structured as hierarchical knowledge-producing centers (Bell, 2018). Thus, with Ethnography, we move away from these centers to build knowledge with youth and children situated on the margins. This perspective requires the inscription of the researcher in an existential territory, accompanied by an exercise of attention to lurking throughout the fieldwork.

The ethnography is based on the creation of devices with a function of reference, explicitness, and subjectivities through which the researcher moves and seeks to establish relationships of trust and draw the plane of the ordinary (Kastrup, Passos & Tedesco, 2014; Passos, Kastrup & Escóssia, 2009). We aim to create relationships of radical solidarity, avoiding a salvationist idea of action (Moura et al, 2022). In order to build a bond that strengthens children and young people in their communities autonomously, we must be willing to relate to them in an open, joyful, and loving way. In this sense, we have to play their games, understand their slang, and discuss the issues they are interested in. We must be available to participate in the activities they invite us to. Thus, we can attend parties, weddings, baptisms, and community events. With time and our presence in the communities, we build a relationship of trust. When we arrive in the peripheral territories, we are welcomed with hugs, kisses, and talks filled with longing. They tell us the news that happens during the week because we are usually present in the communities of the children and young people once a week. However, if it is necessary to go more often during the week, we must be flexible and open to the paths jointly drawn with the youth and children. Thus, the community action of the research must be based on a procedural perspective of construction from the interest of the local agents (Montero, 2004). Passos, Kastrup, and Escóssia (2009) only conceive ethnography as a method because they work with a reversal of its traditional meaning (*meta-hodos*), which would be the previous delimitation of rules, steps and goals. They propose, thus, a *hodos-metá*, i.e., a method "to be experienced and assumed as an attitude (Passos, Kastrup & Escóssia, 2009, p. 11)", and not to be applied in a technicist way.

We have experienced the perspective of ethnography as a posture intrinsic to the research, a set of clues that help build its path. This has led us to consider segments of children and young people, professionals, and family members with whom we are subjects and not objects of the study - therefore, research partners. In the limit, we seek to research with them, and not about them, from various methodological devices and generally defined from the encounters with the field, refusing to stereotype and potentiate the insurrection of subjected knowledge. In

these contexts, we have also focused on listening to life trajectories marked by various expressions of violence, discourses on relationships between youth and violence, meanings produced by the subjects about the conditions of production, and effects of the intensification of homicide in their daily lives. These listening practices aim to address and prevent violence and micro-politics of youth resistance to violence.

We have experienced the perspective of ethnography as a posture intrinsic to the research, a set of clues that help build its path. This has led us to consider segments of children and young people, professionals, and family members with whom we are subjects and not objects of the study - therefore, research partners. In the limit, we seek to research with them, and not about them, from various methodological devices and generally defined from the encounters with the field, refusing to stereotype and potentiate the insurrection of subjected knowledge. In these contexts, we have also focused on listening to life trajectories marked by various expressions of violence, discourses on relationships between youth and violence, and effects of the intensification of homicide in their daily lives. These listening practices aim to address and prevent violence and micro-politics of youth resistance to violence. Barros, Lima, Bessa Filho, Martins, Benicio, and Pinheiro (2017) point out the following characteristic displacements of this mode of research in Social Psychology and Community Psychology: interest in the singular and concrete forms of the problems investigated, preference for clues instead of a static method; production of fissures in assumptions in the process of creating a problematic field; articulation between research and micropolitical transformations; the refusal of specialisms; collectivization of practices and affirmation of multiplicities.

When a situation of violence occurs in the peripheral territories, we analyze with the kids and young people why the episode occurred. For example, when we were holding a painting workshop with children from Estrada Velha (Old Road), a police car suddenly entered the community. The police officers got out of the car and held the man. At that moment, they started beating him. The children started to cry and scream at that situation. We were also scared by that violent situation. After the police car left, we stayed with the children and talked about what had happened. They commented that the police usually act violently toward the people in the community. The children said they feared that someone in their families would suffer violence. During the following months, we started to do playful activities using songs, movies, and images more systematically about violence, racism, and classism. With these activities, the children created a play to question the police violence in the community. We were surprised by the children's ability to create an artistic expression in an autonomous way that questioned police violence. They created a musical genre called funk in Brazil and a dramatization to express that they only want to "walk happily in the favela where I was born".

We want to emphasize the inventive character of Participatory Action Research. This invention has allowed the rejection of perspectives that conceive vulnerability as an intrinsic and inescapable characteristic of marginalized populations. After all, one of the most dangerous theoretical traps is disregarding

these segments' political agency since it would corroborate, directly or indirectly, tutelary practices (Demetre, 2018). Judith Butler (2015, 2018) undoubtedly helps us put the question back in more politically potent terms. There is an unequal distribution of this vulnerability by operations of domination that maximize the induced precariousness of individual lives (Pelbart, 2019). We start here from the understanding that betting on a type of participatory research in the margins should imply the production of marginal research - done and inserted in the margins and at the margins of hegemonic forms of research. In this way, reflexivity is central to opening these creative and participatory possibilities in doing research (Denzin & Lincoln, 2006), having the researcher to daily decentre himself/herself and try to question his place of privilege in the production of knowledge and in the conditions that circumscribe the act of research. Critical reflexivity must align questioning involving the personal and social dimensions (Lykes, 2013).

We understand the invention as a bet that the investigative path is permeated by acts of creation that reinvent the form of research. Traditionally, this form is a linear and progressive continuum of successive steps and previously established data collection procedures (Kastrup, 2009). Experimenting with the invention on the margins has implied attempts to radicalize the participatory character of research. More is needed to participate in the daily study (Rocha, & Aguiar, 2003). Still, it is necessary to seek strategies and spaces so that segments of children and young people also experience the weaving of our research within the conditions made possible by each context in which we are inserted and each moment of investigation. The invention concerns the power of research to perform worlds and ways of moving, problematizing, widening, and, perhaps, undoing margins.

We understand that invention can be present in a new drawing created by a child that questions the unequal structure of society, in a song that a youth presents to us that talks about the situations of racism experienced in the periphery, in a game proposed by another child that brings a more significant community involvement; in an event proposed by the youth that we help to organize. In this way, we understand that the symbolic invention of new possibilities of life in the face of the oppression experienced on the margins is a powerful tool for transformation. Thus, we have also tried to make visible the practices of resistance. As Lacaz, Heckert, and Lima (2015) propose, we focus on experiences engendered by young people who contest social practices (discursive and non-discursive) that disqualify the ways of life in the peripheral territories. Thus, resistance practices are taken here as synonymous with (re) existence (Achinte, 2017) and persistence practices of those who "combine not to die" amidst the upsurge of death and mortification policies.

According to Lacaz, Heckert, and Lima (2015), when researching youth inserted in peripheral contexts, we do not take the peripheral dimension to crystallize Centre and periphery nor reinforce the exclusionary way in which so-called peripheral juveniles have been treated. On the contrary, when we think of peripheral movements activated by young people inserted in contexts marked by the intensification of lethal violence, we want to highlight the possibility of the

invention of ways of existing distinct from the dominant and colonial patterns of life in the margins. This text minimally goes through the socio-historical and political conditions in charge of designing "the" margins through negative views and conceptions. We bet, on the contrary, on the images of the peripheries as a complex composition of personal belonging that intends stigmatizing categorizations, whose understanding includes understanding it from a global and local perspective. Spivak (2010) indicates that the periphery is linked to subalternation, delegitimizing the production of the child's knowledge, poor, black, and female populations. However, researching with young people and children from the periphery can decentralize the hegemonic structure of knowledge, making it a territorialized, embodied, and marginalized science. This way of doing science must focus on these young people and children who have historically already faced violence, prejudice, and dehumanization. Thus, we should recognize ourselves in acts of radical solidarity with these young people and children in their peripheral territories, learning from them and co-constructing new inventive ways of producing knowledge.

Final Considerations

Researching with children and adolescents on the margins of cities in Northeast Brazil is based on an act of displacement from the center of power. We leave the city centers and universities that reproduce colonial hierarchies of knowledge production. In this movement towards the margins, we seek to build relationships of trust, horizontality, and love with these youth and children, questioning the legacy of extermination and epistemicide that the production of scientific knowledge has developed. In these relationships built on the margins, we learn from these children and adolescents that survival is necessary to invent new worlds in which violence, discrimination, and death are questioned. In this sense, we should cultivate the importance of the inventiveness developed by these children and adolescents in participant action research. In this sense, we have greater possibilities of creating territorialized knowledge, embodied and with a genuine social commitment to creating new worlds in which the coloniality of power, being, and knowledge are dismantled.

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Cultural psychology in a subject-scientific perspective¹

Wolfgang Maiers & Katrin Reimer-Gordinskaya

Abstract

Constitutive for the subject-scientific perspective of Critical Psychology, on the one hand, are historically-empirically obtained determinations of the object of knowledge – such as its reconstruction of human nature as societal nature, its materialistic concept of human subjects as socially situated bodily actors as well as its determination of the intentionality of human action coming to bear in the practical possibility relation of individuals to societal structures of meaning – and, on the other hand, methodological principles of actual-empirical research that indicate the consistent transition to a generalised standpoint of the subject as the point of knowledge. This is in principle compatible with cultural-psychological programmes that analyse individual action and psychological phenomena in their dependent relationship to social-culturally handed-down artefacts, discourses and forms of life, and that include humans in research on an equal footing: namely as subjects acting on grounds. A Marxist-based subject-oriented cultural psychology focuses on the determinacy of cultural processes and forms through the mode of production of a societal formation and offers differentiated class-theoretical explanations for the structural intersectional relations of inequality, oppression and discrimination in the diversity of socio-cultural constellations. When put into perspective in this way, the concept of culture can in turn enrich the concept of society with a dimension relevant to action by opening up access to the actors' perspective on the diversity and change of socio-cultural codifications of lifeworlds and subjectivities.

¹ The text is based on an original contribution in German to the handbook *Kulturpsychologie. Eine Einführung* [Cultural Psychology. An Introduction], ed. by Wolfradt et al. (2022) which was published there in a heavily abbreviated version: cf. Maiers & Reimer-Gordinskaya (2022). We would like to thank Manfred Renken for his helpful assistance with the translation. Occasionally the conceptuality of Critical Psychology raises problems in that they cannot easily be transferred into common English terms without loss of (nuances of) meaning. This applies, for instance, to the distinction between *sozial* = *social* and *gesellschaftlich* = *societal* and, even more so, to derivations such as *Vergesellschaftung* = *societalisation* (instead of *socialisation*), *Gesellschaftlichkeit* = *societability* (rather than *sociability*). Other telling examples are concepts such as *Gründe/begründetes Handeln/Begründung/Begründetheit*, where *grounds/grounded action/grounding/groundedness* are a better match than the rationalistically biased *reasons, reasonable action*, and *suchlike*. In general, we have decided to expect the Anglophone reader to accept less common translations if they seemed to us to better convey the connotations of the German original terms. (In the interest of clarity, the latter are appended in brackets in each case.)

For a more detailed impression of the sometimes awkward problems that one encounters when translating German Critical Psychological terminology we refer the reader to the notes in Tolman's (1994) pioneering introduction.

In order to illustrate how subject-scientific studies break down culture as the contradictory meaning of the mode of production and life for individuals in such a way that they can understand external and internal impediments to action and open up possibility spaces for their action in an emancipatory perspective, exemplary presentations include: the critical further development of the methodological guiding concepts of the so-called 'developmental' and 'stagnation figure' respectively, the elimination of the blind spots of the constructivist discourse-analytical 'new childhood research' in the Critical-Psychological view of the dialectics of children's development of agency, as well as the investigation of children's re-/construction of societally prefabricated social categories, stereotypes and prejudices in the living environment of day-care centres, which is shaped by intersectional power relations, by the research project *KiWin*.

Keywords

cross-cultural psychology vs. cultural psychology (- as diverse directions of culture-inclusive psychology), Cultural-historical School, developmental figure (- as a movement form of emancipatory research), German Critical Psychology, grounded action / discourse of groundedness, historical-empirical method, restrictive vs. generalised agency, societal nature (human nature as -), subject science / subject-scientific research and practice, unity of comprehension and change

Critical Psychology - subject science - cultural psychology: Conceptual localisations

In the title of the article, it is assumed that *Critical Psychology*, with its *subject-scientific* orientation, can be classified as a *kind of cultural psychology*. This seems to be beyond question if one considers that in its transformation of radical psychology criticism into the elaboration of a positive psychology conception, it took up the *Cultural-historical School* of Soviet psychology founded by Vygotsky and continued after his death in 1934 by his co-workers Leontiev, Lurija, Galperin and others (cf. Kölbl, 2022). This, in turn, is consistently acknowledged in relevant cultural psychology treatises as a contribution to the "profiling of an advanced cultural psychology" (Straub & Chakkarath, 2010, 195f.) - both directly and by way of explicitly referring to it by various proponents of research into experience- and action-relevant cultural structures of meaning and significance, such as Bruner (1990) or Cole (1996). Critical Psychology is often included in the circle of concepts that are at least partially related to cultural psychology. Billmann-Mahecha (2003), for example, states: "From the 1970s onwards, Klaus Holzkamp's Critical Psychology was added, which, closely following Soviet activity psychology, emphasised the cultural-historical contextuality of human experience and behaviour, without understanding itself in the narrower sense as cultural psychology". Kölbl (op. cit., 18) expresses a similar view.

The positioning of Critical Psychology in the tradition of the *Cultural-historical School* (both in its own and in external perception) must admittedly be relativised in certain respects: Vygotsky's original works (insofar as they were

available at all in German at the time²) were not really constitutive for its emergence. Rather, it was primarily the so-called *activity-theoretical* approach to the study of human consciousness presented in A. N. Leontyev's collection of texts *Development of Mind [Probleme der Entwicklung des Psychischen]*, published in 1963 in the GDR and ten years later in West Germany (Leontjew, 1963/1973), that provided decisive guiding principles for the discussion about the transformation of psychological science on the basis of dialectical historical materialism conducted at the Psychological Institute of the Free University of Berlin.

Differences between Leontyev's and Vygotsky's views will not be explored in detail here (cf. Keiler, 1999), but Keiler's research on the topos *cultural-historical* (cf. Keiler, 2012) should be taken up. According to him, the term "cultural-historical theory" or "school" (this is the name that runs through the original works) was not coined by Vygotsky and the researchers working with him themselves, contrary to the common opinion (also handed down in Critical Psychology: cf. Holzkamp & Schurig, 2015 [1973], 33ff.), but was brought into play by their opponents in the mid-1930s with the intention of bringing the conception of a "[historical] theory of the [development of] higher psychological functions" dangerously close to German *Kulturpsychologie* [cultural psychology] and thus discrediting it as an idealistic, anti-Marxist, pseudo-scientific reactionary theory. In 1956 (the year of the XXth Party Congress of the CPSU), Leontyev and Luria (in their introduction to Vygotsky's *Selected Psychological Research Works*), seizing the bull by the horns, so to speak, appropriated the term *cultural-historical*. In the 1970s, it finally became a valid trademark in international literature for the school of Soviet psychology, which was by then recognised as leading.

Only one problematic aspect of this topos should be mentioned here: On the one hand, the compound term *cultural-historical* fosters a *culturalist* dissolution of the materialist concept of *societal relations/practice* which Vygotsky and his colleagues take as a basis, by means of fuzzier notions of *culture* qua system of linguistic-symbolic meanings, which may even be caught up in linguistic idealism. To speak of a conception of the *cultural* or *cultural-historical* determinacy of development with reference to Vygotsky, as Keiler points out, can only be valid on the proviso that he always emphasised the *sociality* of the human being as an essential (inner) condition of specifically human psychological development and explicitly regarded *culture* as something *derived*, as the "result of the human's social life and communal activity" (Sobr. soč. , 3, 145; as cited in Keiler, 2012, 119). On the other hand, the term *cultural-historical* obscures the fundamental point of Vygotsky's approach, which is to overcome the common dichotomisation between the naturalness and societality of human development of consciousness and to grasp its mediation process theoretically.

² In the 1970s, we mainly had a German-language version of *Denken und Sprechen* [Thinking and Speech] (Russian original: 1934; German: Berlin/DDR: Akademie Verlag 1964; Frankfurt/M. : Fischer 1977) available, which was problematic because it was based on a misleading and erroneous Soviet republication from 1956. It was not until 2002 that a new critical edition based on the original manuscript, previously thought to be lost, appeared by Rückriem & Lompscher (Vygotskij, 2002).

However the relationship to Vygotsky's ideas is to be assessed in detail, his central epistemological concern of approaching the study of the human psyche *from a comprehensively historical perspective* comes to full fruition in Leontyev's book. Scientifically understanding the concrete human being in his or her culturally specific individuality and subjectivity – in a well-understood sense of *cultural history* – means explicating him or her in the unity of his or her *natural, societal and individual historical development* from the objective necessities of the material life process. Following Marx, it is worked out how historical development in its human specificity has developed with objective labour and takes place in the accumulation of societal experience mediated through material, iconic and linguistic-symbolic objectifications. Through the practical process of their individual-historical appropriation, each individual human being participates in this societal process and thus also unfolds his or her personal life. Accordingly, the structures and forms of human consciousness must change with the various stages of objective production and the relations of production entered into in the process. The individual development of consciousness – this is fundamental for Vygotsky's as well as Leontyev's psychological approach – also takes place through the *objective activity of the human being*. The historical-societal forms of consciousness (mediated by psych[olog]ical tools) emerge in each individual person from external activities, which are then gradually transformed into internal, mental activities (*interiorisation*).

This *historical-genetic paradigm* has decisively inspired the methodological maxim of Critical Psychology, which is still valid today, to work out, in a *historical analysis of origin and differentiation* [*Ursprungs- und Differenzierungsanalyse*], the essential inner connections of the psychological phenomena in question together with the mediating processes leading to their manifestations. Through the *categorical determinations* of the *subject matter* [*kategoriale Gegenstandsbestimmungen*] thus obtained, it attempts to arrive at a concrete-historical theory of human-societal subjectivity that overcomes the bourgeois-psychological presupposition of an "abstract - isolated - human individual" (Marx, 1845, MEW 3, 7) along with the associated mystifying construction of a *universal-societal* [*allgemeingesellschaftlich*] human being.

The term *subject science* [*Subjektwissenschaft*] was first used in the context of Critical Psychology at its 1st International Congress in Marburg in 1977³, when the aim was to justify both the possibility (proven by the facticity of Critical Psychology) of a Marxist-based psychological science of the individual and the necessity of such an internal expansion of Marxism. In doing so, it was necessary to refute objections that were unanimously based on its misguided economistic-reductionist interpretation but led to contrary conclusions – such that, for example, the *Projekt Klassenanalyse* (*Project Class Analysis*: see, e.g., Bischoff, 1973) considered the political-economic analysis of capitalism sufficient to derive statements about human subjectivity, while the *Kritische*

³ If we associate the *subject-scientific perspective* with *Critical Psychology* (cf. Holzkamp, 1988), this is by no means to ignore the fact that other critical positions also oppose the denial of the subject by the psychological mainstream with explicit subject orientations.

Theorie des Subjekts (*Critical Theory of the Subject*: see, e.g. Lorenzer, 1974) deemed it necessary to supplement Marxist societal theory with an independent extra-Marxist (namely psychoanalytical) theory of subjectivity.

In contrast, in his opening lecture at the congress Klaus Holzkamp (1977 [2015]) argued that although a Marxist individual science is essentially determined by the analysis of the overarching societal-historical process and is thus secondary, it can nevertheless be distinguished as a special science with a specific object and specific procedures that can be derived from it, since in their life activity the individuals are the permanent result of their individual-historical development, the laws of which do not coincide with those of the historical process, however closely they are interwoven with them.

Holzkamp (op. cit. , 232) described the historical materialist conception as "the *general historical subject science* par excellence" because, as a revolutionary theory, it aims at the empowerment of collective human actors. With regard to the psychology to be developed within this framework, which aims to help release the efficacy of concrete individuals against external and internal resistance, it is then said:

If the general object of Marxist theory is the relationship between objective determinacy and subjective determination of the historical process and its practical goal is the development of the *subjective* factor in history, then (. . .) the *remaining object of Critical-Psychological approaches is the relationship between objective determinacy and subjective determination in the life activity of concrete individuals*. Its character as a '*special subject science*' within scientific socialism would then consist in the fact that it has as its *practical goal the development of the subjective-active component, i. e. self-determination, in individual life activity*. (op. cit. , 232f.)

In the writings of the 1980s, this critical-emancipatory basic concern of the Marxist-subject-scientific knowledge approach, to understand the surrender of individuals to (capitalist) conditions and the subjective necessity of overcoming them, taking into account the developmental interests of the respective others, and in this practical understanding to critically *sublate* views of traditional psychology caught up in bourgeois ideology, is affirmed on various occasions (cf. Holzkamp, 1988). On the other hand, concrete provisions of a subject-scientific psychology were elaborated in that period (especially in Holzkamp's magnum opus of 1983, *Grundlegung der Psychologie* [Foundations of Psychology]), even though terminologically *individual science* is consistently spoken of).

Psychology from the generalised standpoint of the subject

Under the premise of the prevailing *nomological-functionalistic variable psychology*, which in its experimental-statistical conditional analyses seeks to grasp human behaviour and experience as effects, consequences, correlates of situational conditions conceived as causal determinants, subjectivity is

naturalistically failed to recognise in its historical concreteness of respective life situations. If the programmatic critique of this reifying reduction of human subjectivity not only wants to rehabilitate the everyday experience of human intentionality and reflexivity as an inescapable thematic starting point of research, but also to develop a thoroughgoing methodological alternative, it needs other, substantively more sustainable concepts of human subjectivity. In Critical Psychology, the *historical-empirical categorial analysis* – distinguished from *actual-empirical* research methodology – fulfils precisely this function of developing scientific basic concepts of psychological theorising in a methodical, i. e. empirically verifiable way, in which (in a specialisation of dialectical-materialistic developmental knowledge) the essential relations of the psychological object (psyche/consciousness) are derived in their historical determination and concreteness from the developmental logic of its having become. (Holzkamp, 1983, 48ff. , 207ff. , 249ff. ; Maiers, 1999; Markard, 2009, 106ff.).

In particular, this conceptuality must grasp the specific human-world relationship associated with the effective implementation of the societal-historical process, characterised by a *gnostic distance* fundamental to human consciousness: The objective-social meanings refer to historically produced forms of practice that, from the standpoint of the individuals, only represent generalised possibilities of action, to which in principle (within historically set limits) they can behave consciously - and that means: with alternatives. Against the traditional naturalistic reduction of individual subjectivity to its mere conditionality by the circumstances of life, and against the idealistic exaltation of the autonomy of the subjects in this respect, it is a matter of mapping in the psychological categories the two-sidedness of human action in the material intermediary context of individual and society – the relationship between *objective determinacy* and *subjective determination*. The essential quality of human subjectivity, being able to consciously relate to the objective-social world and to oneself, does not entail the abandonment of any idea of determination: individual action, though not simply causally determined by conditions, is nevertheless grounded in them. The circumstances of the material-social context of life, as they are *experienced* in their significance as objective preconditions for action at the respective location of the individuals and according to their current needs and interests, provide the essential *premises* for someone's *grounds* for acting now in this way and not otherwise. For others, such *grounds for action* [*Handlungsgründe*] are in principle comprehensible in that people cannot consciously act contrary to their own experienced life interests. This is the *material apriori* of human self-awareness, of interpersonal understanding – and thus also of subject-scientific knowledge.

Let us summarise: Relevant are, on the one hand, *categorial determinations of the subject matter* [*kategoriale Gegenstandsbestimmungen*], in which human subjectivity is conceived in concretisation of the scientific humanism inherent in Marxism and for the purpose of overcoming both the naturalistic objectivism of the dominant psychology and the abstract opposition of the natural and the societal or cultural found in various subject-oriented critiques of *subjectless*

psychology (cf. Maiers, 1993; 2019a). This essentially includes an empirically anchored human-scientific concept of human nature, which as *societal nature* establishes the "*human potentiality*" (*Menschenmöglichkeit* - Tomberg, 1978, 76) of individual socialisation under concrete-historical societal conditions; furthermore, a *decentred materialist concept of the subject*, which grasps the individual experiencing his or her world and himself or herself in his or her "real, sensuous activity" (Marx, 1845, MEW 3, 5) as an objectively and personal-biographically *situated* subject bound to his or her *corporeality* (cf. Holzkamp, 1983, 336ff). Constitutive of human subjectivity is the characteristic of *intentionality*: action and experience are always directed towards an objective-meaningful reality and, as a *centre of intentionality*, the human being relates to his or her living conditions in a subjectively grounded way (*bewusstes Verhalten zu [conscious behaviour towards]*: Holzkamp, op. cit, 237ff.); this practical *possibility relation* of individuals to the societal structures of meaning is specified in subject-scientific terms as the *double possibility of acting* in the direction of securing *restrictive* or gaining *generalised agency*, (Holzkamp, 1983, 342ff. ; Markard, 2009, 180ff.), etc.

On the other hand, *methodological consequences* for (actual) empirical research arise from these content-related subject-theoretical conceptualisations. It goes without saying that the claim to understand the world- and self-experience of individual subjects psychologically without any reduction in methodical rigour, rather in the perspective of objective explanation and generalisation, is incompatible with any psychology from a third point of view, in which (other) subjects are *researched* from a distanced observer perspective. If subject-scientific psychology specifically aims at the subjective mode of experience of objective societal possibilities and limitations of action, the subjects as the origin of such experience cannot be placed on the object side, but must stand on the side of the researchers. Some of the methodological research principles and objectification criteria mentioned in more detail below also apply to other subject-oriented positions in a similar way, while others represent Critical-Psychological specifics.

Actual-empirical studies from the standpoint of the subject share with *qualitative research* the maxim of not being bound by a fixed canon of methods, but regarding methodical development itself as part of the research situation; likewise the view of data collection and evaluation being continuously linked in a dynamic optimisation process of hypothesis-guided data acquisition and data-based revision of hypothesis formation.

With *action research* in particular, it shares the orientation towards a research setting designed as a *meta-subjective scientific framework of understanding* [*metasubjektiver Verständigungsrahmen*], in which the epistemic interest of professional researchers is to be included in a methodologically reflected way, while those affected, whose challenges of practical life (self-) clarifications are elevated to a more general problem of subjective modes of action and inner states to be grasped scientifically, actively participate and become qualified as *co-researchers* (cf. Holzkamp, 1983, 540ff. ; Markard, 2009, 263ff.). Furthermore, subject-scientific empirical research as *emancipatory*

action research includes a *unity of comprehension and change* [*Einheit von Erkennen und Verändern*] in such a way that the assumptions developed in the joint cognitive process, how an expansion of the disposal of one's own impeding life situation and an improvement of the subjective ability to act and quality of life could be achieved by including the point of view of others, are tested and verified in a *controlled exemplary practice* [*kontrolliert-exemplarische Praxis*] (cf. Holzkamp, op. cit. , 560ff.).

The *specific difference* of subject-scientific actual-empirical methods lies in the methodological foundation of empiricism through object categories that are suitable for opening up the *manifestations of subjective agency/mental situation* [*subjektive Handlungsfähigkeit/Befindlichkeit*] and the *contradictory meaning-grounds nexuses* [*Bedeutungs-Begründungs-Zusammenhänge*] of human action under the historically concrete living conditions of bourgeois society, and guidelines derived from this for the *generalisability of subjective experience data*. From the fact that the grounds for action, in whose medium human life activity is carried out in its specificity, are *first-person* and can only be negotiated from *ever my* point of view, it necessarily follows that epistemologically the subject point of view must be brought to bear as a scientific point of view of knowledge. This means that both in theory formation and in research practice, the corresponding *discourse of groundedness* [*Begründungsdiskurs*] must be maintained as a "discourse form of intersubjective interaction that is centrally specified by the nexus between meanings, grounds and action intentions/actions" – in contrast to the *discourse of conditionality* [*Bedingtheitsdiskurs*], "whose nexus . . . is specified as a 'cause-effect relation'" (Holzkamp, 1996, 64 [2013, 294⁴]).

Conveyed by the research context, the practical development and validation of a subjectively more satisfying everyday way of life also provides an approach to the generalised identification of possibilities for action for others in comparable life situations. The concept of the so-called *structural* or *possibility generalisation* [*strukturelle Verallgemeinerung/Möglichkeitsverallgemeinerung*] (Holzkamp, 1983, 545ff. ; cf. also Markard, 2009, 287ff.) – developed in rejection of average statements and thus in limiting the validity of the model of statistical generalisation, as well as in connection with Lewin's concept of *generalisation* from the *individual case* to the *pure case* – does not refer to dimensions of randomly recorded characteristics of people, but to *premise-ground connexions* and the use or expansion of subjective scopes of disposal of action. The ultimate criterion for confirming such determinations of *typical possibility spaces* [*Möglichkeitsräume*], which are developed in the course of intersubjective understanding between researchers and the co-researchers concerned and are validated as presumably accurate (and applicable) through self-subsumptions, lies in (life) practice.

It should have become clear: *Sensu stricto subject science/subject-scientific* means a subject orientation in the radical way of a consistent transition of

⁴ The translation of the technical terms *Bedingtheits-/Begründungsdiskurs* as *discourse of conditioning* and *reason discourse* respectively in the edition of *Selected Writings of Klaus Holzkamp* by Schraube & Osterkamp (2013) differs from our definition – see in this regard our comment in footnote 1.

research from a supposedly uninvolved external standpoint and its 3rd person observation perspective to the generalised standpoint of the subject and its 1st person perspective - and this *change of epistemic standpoint* forms a distinguishing feature of Critical Psychology.

In the following, we will set out the framework within which its perspective of subject-scientific research can be subsumed under the term cultural psychology.

Linkage to cultural psychology

In the field of *culture-inclusive psychology*, one encounters two basic directions, starting from different (social) ontological or anthropological presuppositions and leading to corresponding epistemological-methodological consequences: The so-called *cross-cultural psychology* – as a sub-discipline of nomological-functionalistic variable psychology – assumes the psychologically interesting phenomena to be universal biopsychic conditions of human nature, whose causal laws are to be uncovered in preferably experimental conditional analyses. Under this premise, it attributes interculturally observable differences to moderating influences of specific socio-cultural environments (cf. e. g. Berry et al. , 1997).

In this kind of *culturally sensitive contextualism*, culture is seen as a separate sphere, independent of natural individuals and their activities. *Cultural psychology* sensu stricto breaks with such naturalistic ontology and the variable-analytic methodology of conceptualising culture as an external condition, a set of antecedent (independent or moderator) variables of behaviour and experience.

Attempting to draw a basic (meta-) theoretical and methodological understanding that connects the various currents of cultural psychology from relevant representations (e. g. Boesch, 1991; Billmann-Mahecha, 2003; Cole, 1996; Shweder, 1990; Straub & Chakkarath, 2010), it can be outlined as an interdisciplinary general perspective that takes a look at psychological phenomena (structures, processes, functions) in their *constitutional relationship* to the meanings handed down in a historically specific social-cultural environment. Cultures are conceptualised as systems of signs, knowledge, rules and symbols that fulfil orientation functions for corporeal, language-enabled, sentient subjects capable of acting by allowing them to give meaning and significance to their world and self. The arrangements of action-guiding discourses, practices, forms of life are perceived from respective individual standpoints in different perspectives. They form dynamic spaces of experience and horizons of expectation that are shared by members of respective cultural collectives, whereby multiple (possibly conflictual) cultural affiliations are not only possible but also to be expected in societies that are complex and, not least, culturally differentiated. Insofar as the relationship of the individual subjects of a cultural group (also) to (their own) culture is not assumed to be an unproblematic appropriation of/adaptation to the cultural meanings/means (*enculturation* in the harmonistic sense of traditional structural functionalism), power and domination relations can be thematised.

This cultural knowledge, which on the one hand opens up and limits people's spaces of experience and action, and on the other hand is (re-)constructed and changed in the course of individual conduct of life and social exchange, can take on different forms: It can be explicit, articulated and reflected or remain implicit, physically embodied and staged performatively, objectified in institutions, materialised in non-linguistic things, spaces and places, embodied in symbolic representations (such as club badges) or present in traces (for example, in "narrative abbreviations" that refer to identity-forming and preserving stories such as 9/11). This is where the cultural-psychological interpretation of action comes in.

In order to understand "how people make personal use of their customary practices, traditional institutions, symbolic and resources, inherited conceptions of things to construct a world that makes sense and to constitute a life-space in which they can feel at home" (Stigler et al. , 1990, vii), the conceptualisation of such mutual constitution of culture and individual requires a concept of subject that emphasises the intentionality of human consciousness:

Sociocultural worlds are understood as intentional worlds that are factual and effective only through people who draw action-guiding meanings from them: 'no sociocultural environment exists or has identity independent of the way human beings seize meanings and resources from it, while every human being has her or his subjectivity and mental life altered through the process of seizing meanings and resources from some sociocultural environment and using them' (Shweder 1990, 2). (Staeuble, 2002, 100)

In their *methodological rationale*, research programmes in cultural psychology are therefore guided by a subject model that assumes the human being as a socially situated, reflexive and intentional actor who pursues goals and broader life orientations in his or her actions and gives meaning and significance to all his or her experiencing and doing as well as to the adversities of life. Cultural knowledge is not seen as a causally effective condition of human action, but as a reservoir of manifold, systematically distinguishable types of *determining reasons* [*Bestimmungsgründe*], to which the always *polyvalent* structure of meaning and significance of actions is owed (cf. Boesch, 1991). Actions (such as the ritual eating of a host) refer to cultural (in this case: religious) representations of the world and practices, through which their occurrence becomes understandable in the first place. Accordingly, they cannot be conceptualised as discrete variables that are logically independent of them and stand in purely empirical-contingent relationships to them; their interrelationships cannot be described as laws of nature according to the causalist model – neither in the strictly deductive-deterministic sense nor in the weakened inductive-statistical sense, in which strict laws of nature are replaced by probabilistic statements. Since constructions of meaning and signification can only be deduced reconstructively and interpretatively, the hermeneutic problem of understanding meaning is at the centre of the methodological reflections of cultural psychology. In general, its empiricism follows the principle of connecting to everyday or lifeworld experience and practices of giving meaning and adapting its methodical

instruments to the respective research topic of interest, if necessary also developing them in the course of the research. This open understanding of methods does not exclude the use of standardised quantitative and experimental methods, but relativises it considerably in favour of a methodical repertoire consisting primarily of qualitative, reconstructive or interpretative procedures.

Finally, it follows from the above that cultural psychology shares the *criticism of the epistemological ethnocentrism* of the dominant (culture-blind and thus all the more culture-bound) psychology, which is pronounced by the so-called *indigenous* psychologies, and accordingly endeavours to include the so-called others and strangers as research partners and subjects who bring in their own cultural (psychological) knowledge. The concept of culture as an intentional world, as a *processed experience* of events, practices and artefacts, includes recognising and acknowledging the plurality of cultures "as their creation, not ours" (Schwartz, 1992, op. cit. , 345).

If one takes the key aspects outlined above as the quintessence of the cultural psychological approach to knowledge, then various affinities with the Critical-Psychological definitions of the subject-scientific perspective are unmistakable, which justify their classification as cultural psychology – provided certain criteria are observed.

This reservation is not without reason, considering that in the course of its social-scientific boom, the concept of culture has tended to displace the concept of society: "As comprehensible as the societal constitution of subjectivity and action once appeared in the concepts of the mode of production and social structure, it sometimes appears as blurred in concepts of cultural lifeworlds and practices". (Staeuble, 2002, 97). However, as stated at the beginning, Marxist individual science is essentially bound to the prior analysis of the societal process overarching the individual life processes in its historical specificity. In this respect, a subject-scientific perspective within cultural psychology can only be maintained under the double precondition that it does not misunderstand culture as an external boundary condition of the actions and experiences of individuals, but rather grasps it as their *medium* (Cole, 1996), which contains both the objects and the means of mental development to which individuals enter into an active relationship of appropriation; and that at the same time it does not idealistically reduce this historical socio-cultural world to a system of linguistic symbolic meanings (whose intersubjective signification is created and secured in communicative processes of negotiation), but materialistically understands it as a totality of objectified meanings created in the historical process of societal labour, which includes the differentiation of the level of the symbolic-linguistic.

In contrast to the theoretical isolation of the cultural from other societal practices and contexts of effects, it is important to recognise that the societal totality forms a complex structure with the inclusion of a dominant factor. The mode of production and relations of production of a societal formation determine cultural processes and forms (while recognising their relative autonomy and their own logics).

Set in relation in this way, culture does not have to be an omnibus concept for everything societal and cultural coinage does not have to be an indeterminate

conceptual substitute for the societal determinacy of human subjectivity. This fact was already shown in the late 1950s by the cultural theory writings of Hoggart, Williams, and Thompson and the subsequent work of the Birmingham Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies (Hall, Willis et al.) (cf. Ampuja & Koivisto, 2012).

Understood as "the actual, grounded terrain of practices, representations, languages and customs of any specific historical society" (Hall, 1986, cited in Nelson, Treichler & Grossberg 1992, 5), the concept of culture, for its part, can add an action-relevant dimension to the concept of society by opening up access to the perspective of the actors, the world and self-understanding of social groups. The insight of theory of society (eminent in comparison to the naturalism prevailing in psychology) that sustainable constructions of the psychological should reflect societal-historically specific forms of individuality/subjectivity would thus be supplemented by the cultural theoretical idea of a diversity and changeability of *socio-cultural codifications of life worlds and subjectivities* (cf. also Staeuble, 2002, 97).

However, today's social sciences – especially since their postmodern distancing from Marx – are only partially suitable for the foundational reference of psychological theory formation to critical theory of society. In particular, they lack a concept for understanding the class societies of the 21st century. Scientific and political progress in terms of class analysis achieved in the wake of the 1968 movement has in many cases been forgotten and replaced by interpretations of society that merely duplicate in descriptive terms what is happening on a global scale on the societal surface of capitalist relations through the development of productive forces and the permanent restructuring of class contexts: The dissolution of old and the emergence of new social milieus, the mass increase in precarious living conditions with the intensification of class antagonism and horizontal class-specific inequalities, the formation of plural identities that often appear fragmented, the development of altered subjectivities linked to the change in forms of individuality and subjectivation, the consumerist lifestyle stagings of the so-called "high achievers" of high-tech capitalism, but also the public articulation of new emancipatory claims of the subjects, and so on and so forth.

In our conviction, the social-scientific penetration of such rapidly advancing transformation processes of capitalist society requires, in particular the (re)appropriation, critical further development and connection of Marxist, Marxist-feminist and praxeological class theories (cf. for example Candeias, 2021). Only on the basis of their conceptual foundation and material basis do we – Critical Psychology and cultural psychology alike – see ourselves as sufficiently equipped to understand the processes of interpretation and practical appropriation, in which people give meaning to their lives in such changed social-cultural constellations characterised by intersectional structural relations of inequality, oppression and discrimination (with regard to class or gender, categories such as ethnicity, sexuality, age, etc.).

Anchoring a subject-scientific perspective in cultural psychology thus also requires introducing the most advanced class-related theoretical and political concepts into its discourse in order to gain a differentiated, empirically

underpinned theoretical explanation of the diversity of cultural references to life. At the same time, this serves to sharpen the subject-scientific perspective on the active moment of human subjectivity: grounded action, insofar as the *analysis of grounds* [*Begründungsanalyse*] of human action can connect to more concrete *meaning-analytical* [*bedeutungsanalytisch*] findings.

Following a subject-scientific research orientation, a systematic ambiguity and corresponding need for clarification is assumed on the part of affected subjects with regard to the connection, experienced as ambiguous or contradictory, between life interests, circumstances and actions to be grounded on them – an ambiguity through which the subjects are at the mercy of certain dependency situations in their life practice and are thus hindered in exercising control over their life circumstances and in their quality of life. *Analyses of (objective) meaning and (subjective) grounds*, as intertwined systematic tasks of knowledge in the actual empirical research process, aim at understanding the subjective functionality of restrictive coping strategies by first determining the different possibilities and limits of action existing in a historically concrete constellation of economic, political, legal, ideological and cultural conditions, and secondly, by understanding how and on the basis of which premises these objective spaces of possibility are realised individually and how subjective agency and mental states are formed (cf. Holzkamp, 1983, 349ff; Markard, 2009, 160ff, 180ff.).

Application: Actual-empirical subject-scientific research and practice

In its actual-empirical research and practice, Critical Psychology follows the psychological traces of societalisation in capitalist, patriarchal and further historically specific forms from the standpoint of the subject. In view of the (not only) mental costs of living in a society permeated by domination, it emphasises the emancipatory potential of psychological research and practice, which can contribute to the expansion of human possibilities of action in the perspective "to overthrow all relations in which man is a debased, enslaved, abandoned, despicable being ⁵" (Marx, 1843/44, MEW 1, 385). And while *traditional* psychologies with their individualising concepts, passivising research methods and technologies of differentiation and selection stabilise domination, psychologists can also help shape the conditions of the culture of a mode of production and life (Gramsci), in which "the free development of each is the condition for the free development of all" (Marx & Engels, 1848, MEW 4, 482).

⁵ In the English source to which we refer, the translation *essence* is used for the German word *Wesen* in the Marx quote. Outside the context of his critical discussion of Feuerbach, in which Marx speaks of the "essence of man" as "[in] reality [being] the ensemble of the social relations" (Marx 1845, 6), this expression is out of place and has therefore been replaced by *being*. This does not cut off the controversial issue of a "theoretical anti-humanism" (Althusser) in Marx's thought, or, in contrast, of whether and in what way a theory of *human nature* occupies an important place in Marx' critique of capitalism and his materialist conception of history. On this, see e.g. Sève (1972); Rückriem et al. (1978); Geras (1983); from a Critical-psychological perspective: Maiers 1993; 2019a.

The Psyche in a Problematic Culture of the Capitalist Mode of Production and Life

Over a period of more than 40 years, four generations of Critical Psychologists have presented alternatives to existing psychological concepts and practices in almost all fields of psychology.⁶ The fund stretches from the *Projekt Analyse psychologischer Praxis (PAPP)* (project analysis of psychological practice), which showed, among other things, how psychological concepts serve to maintain the power-relation between client and therapist by reinforcing the latter's sovereignty of interpretation without easing the suffering of the former, through the work of Critical Psychologists in *Berliner Weglaufhaus* (Berlin's house for run aways) as a practical alternative to psychiatry and the approach of a psychotherapy of everyday life (Dreier, 2011) to the critique of the concept of psychic/ psychological disorders (Weber & Brensell, 2015) and behavioural therapy of depression (Knebel, 2021); from the exploration of institutional racism in shelters for asylum seekers in the *Projekt Rassismus als Selbstentmächtigung* (project racism as disempowerment) to the clarification of the interplay between psycho-social counselling for victims of right-wing violence and civil society mobilisation against racism (Köbberling, 2018) as well as of potentials for alliances against antisemitism (Reimer-Gordinskaya & Tzschiesche, 2021); from the analysis of the ambivalent meaning of changes of productive forces for employees in the *Projekt Automation und Qualifikation* (project automation and qualification) to the reconstruction of how trade union strategies can enhance collective agency, if they encompass not only the workplace but also the seemingly private context of life (Schmalstieg, 2015); from the *Erinnerungsarbeit* [memory work] on female societalisation in the *Projekt Frauenformen* (project shaping women) through the critique of prevailing sex education (Zirkel, 2008) to the development of feminist trauma work (Brensell et al. 2020); from the foundation and elaboration of a subject-scientific concept of human learning (Holzkamp, 1993; Maiers, 2018, 2019b) and the critique of education and 'teaching-learning' in various pedagogical settings, such as *Umgang mit Kindern* (interacting with children) in the family, adult education (Faulstich & Ludwig, 2004), neoliberal higher education (Thiel, 2010) and extracurricular education (Reimer, 2011), to the debate on the validity of related theoretical assumptions under the conditions of neoliberal subjectification (Kaindl, 2005; Langemeyer, 2005; Markard, 2005).

Regardless of the range of content, the common impetus of subject-scientific research is to reconstruct connections between seemingly purely individual phenomena with social contexts and underlying societal structures. In this context, *culture* is understood as the contradictory meaning of the mode of production and life for societal individuals and is analysed more concretely with respect to external and internal impediments to action and, alternatively, spaces

⁶ Although there is a lack of more or less complete overviews, for reasons of space, older, classical approaches that can be found on the web via the italicised proper names are named below without individual references (cf. also the compilation in Markard, 2020), while more recent contributions are referred to directly.

of possibility for individual and collective action in an emancipatory perspective (Markard, 2009, 64ff u. 92ff). The societal conditions to be taken into account are subject to potentially fundamental transformation, which a psychology that understands the psychic as societally mediated must keep up with by referring to relevant theory of society. In addition, inner-scientific controversies and findings also give rise to criticism or revision and further development of subject-scientific concepts and theories. For instance, the societal and science-political consequences of the historical caesura of 1989 brought challenges with them and initiated efforts and controversies through which Critical Psychology as a Marxist approach was updated and renewed in the sense of the principle of *critique and further development* [*Kritik und Weiterentwicklung*] (Markard, op.cit., 152ff and 209ff).

In view of the wide range of content of subject-scientific research, its concrete, actual-empirical methodology cannot be reduced to a simple denominator. Basically, the spectrum of qualitative research methods is used, so that very different types of data (verbal and observational data, documents, media products, diaries, pictures, etc.) can be included. However, the data-based theorising, takes place on the basis of the above-mentioned methodological regulations and concepts. It is also specific to subject-scientific research that it has concretised concepts of action research in terms of a generalised standpoint of the subject. In the following, essential aspects of this research conception will be illustrated in its emergence, critique and further development.

The developmental figure as a movement form of emancipatory research

In the concept of the *developmental figure* [*Entwicklungsfigur*] the claim to realise research that intervenes in problematic conditions with an emancipatory intention has been methodically concretised. It was developed in the *Projekt Subjektentwicklung in der frühen Kindheit* (SUFKI) (project subject development in early childhood) (cf. Markard, 2009, 279ff). The fact that twelve researchers and parents met at approximately fortnightly intervals between 1977 and 1983 to jointly analyse critical situations in the coexistence of adults and their children indicates three essential characteristics of this type of action research: 1. it is about recognising and changing everyday practical problems, not problems constructed for research settings; 2. Those who in traditional research take the role of *test persons* (here: parents) are *co-researchers* who, as those affected, have a practical interest in the research process that converges with the researchers' scientific interest in a phenomenon that is in general need of clarification (here: early stages of ontogenesis); and finally, 3. it is about de-privatising and publicising seemingly individual problems of life in a capitalist society (here: child-adult coordination in the institution of the family). In SUFKI, the temporal and financial resources as well as habitual similarities of the participants made such a research practice possible. The concept of developmental figure is a critical regulative for subject-scientific research in other settings, and at the same time itself needs modification, expansion and

concretisation (Markard, 2009, 277ff), as will be illustrated in comparison with another example about dilemmas of critically intended extracurricular civic education (ECE - cf. Reimer, 2011, 34ff).

Ideally, a developmental figure passes through four instances.

1. First of all, it is necessary to circumscribe a subjective problem of action that the participants are interested in analysing and overcoming in practice.

In SUFKI, for example, relevant scenes were highlighted from the extensive data material of parents' diaries on the interaction of children and adults – for example, the fact that conflicts between children and parents sparked off because several children wanted to have or do the same thing at the same time, even if this is objectively impossible (e. g. sitting in the middle). The initial problem in ECE, viz.: to often fall short of enabling fundamentally critical debates on the interrelations between individual actions, social contexts and societal structures, resulted from the reflection of the author's professional experiences, but was shared by colleagues who therefore participated as interview partners and to a certain extent as co-researchers.

2. The next step is to generate a problem theory formulated in the discourse of groundedness, based on Critical Psychological categories and anchored in the data material, which captures the premises and reasons for the genesis and reproduction of these problems. In doing so, it is conceptually assumed that those affected are involved in the reproduction of their own problems in the context of gaining restrictive agency.

In the aforementioned context of SUFKI, this was the case, for example, when parents made the concept of equality regulation their own premise for action and believed that this would allow justice to prevail in their relationship with their children and prevent conflicts. In ECE, it was demonstrated how the educational practice – contrary to the intention – stays within the limits of progressive neoliberalism (Fraser) insofar as it conceptually and didactically addresses societal structures selectively, for example by ignoring class relations, and predominantly in their immediate significance for the subjects, instead of making collective experiences the starting point for learning about this specific form of capitalist modes of production and life.

3. Insofar as the co-researchers acknowledge their practice to be a case of the presumed premise-ground nexus, alternative courses of action can be generated, practically tested and reconstructed in so-called solution theories.

In the SUFKI case, it was assumed that the concept of equality regulation was adopted and utilised by the children as a predominant mode of rearticulating their needs, thus hindering interactions between adults and children oriented towards real needs; the alternative – not to be gained without conflict – was to abandon the idea of equality regulation and to learn how to address needs more adequately. In ECE, an alternative course of action lay in developing didactics that correspondingly enable a more comprehensive examination of the reproduction of

domination under neoliberalism. While those involved in the SUFKI project adopted the theory of the problem and tested alternatives accordingly, the views of the colleagues in ECE remained divided regarding the solution theory developed at the time.

4. The changed practice is documented and evaluated and, if it has succeeded in expanding possibilities for action, the developmental figure comes to a provisional end and can serve as a theoretically and empirically sound good practice for others who face similar problems. If the attempts to change a problematic practice fail, the premises and reasons for this failure are examined, passing through all instances (so-called *stagnation figure* [*Stagnationsfigur*]).

The extent to which parents and children in SUFKI succeeded in overriding the validity of the problematic premise-ground-relation – "if we elevate equality regulation to the guiding principle of our relationships with children, we reproduce and exacerbate a problem that should thereby be defused" – was not publicly documented. Due to the much more limited time span of ECE, it was not possible to go through the third and fourth instances of the developmental figure. However, the work represented an intermediate stage in a process that preceded it and continued after it. And while the attempts of the author to restructure her educational work in the following years often failed due to the hegemony of inadequate, but popular concepts in the field of civic education, many professionals have begun to adopt a more critical stance, i.e. towards capitalism and class relations in recent years. This may contribute to a broader adoption of the solution theory presented in ECE.

The comparison of the two *figures of development* and *stagnation* indicates the further development of the concept. The starting point was the self-critical diagnosis (Holzkamp, 1996, 159; Markard, 2000, 238) that although the SUFKI de facto referred to a specific societal-social constellation (the interaction of children and adults within the institution of the family in Fordism, etc.), the original version of the method did not sufficiently reflect the (possible) significance of these circumstances for the problems of action and their transformation. The same applies to the above-mentioned study of the reproduction of institutional racism in shelters for asylum seekers, whose function in institutionalising racism was not sufficiently taken into account (Fried, 2002). Here, the concept of personal agency, which is used to ask about impediments and possibilities of living in the face of the overall societal mediatedness of individual existence, and actual-empirical research methodology diverge, or the methodology falls short of the theoretical concept. More adequate is a methodology in which the genesis of (inter-)individual problems of action and perspectives for change are not merely contextualised, but in which questions are asked about how the social contexts are institutionally integrated and societally structured.

As will be shown below, the object of human development can also be used to illustrate one of the above-mentioned specific features of the Critical-Psychological perspective in cultural psychology.

Contradictions and limits of psychological cultural theories using the example of child development

Contradictions of a certain cultural-theoretical perspective in psychology or on the psychic become apparent from a Critical-Psychological point of view when it comes to subject areas in which natural and societal-historical developmental moments are interconnected. Exemplary for this is human ontogenesis with the fact that human newborns come into the world in a state in need of help, in which they are not able to survive on their own and – in a relatively long time compared to other mammals – must fundamentally acquire individual abilities to use the historically specific societal possibilities for action. The natural (-historical) dimension of this developmental fact has been absolutised in the dominant developmental-psychological paradigm, so that child development and childhood have been understood as quasi-natural conditions and accordingly made the object of research with quasi-scientific methods, which designed age-normalised developmental courses on the basis of observational data and assumed universal regularities (Woodhead, 2009).

This developmental thinking arose from a societal approach to children that subjugated them in the form of education – and at the same time legitimised this practice. In the 1970s, critical voices from psychology and the newly emerging sociology of childhood turned against the inherent naturalisation and universalisation of childhood. Instead of perpetuating it as a quasi-natural phase of life, childhood was understood here as a societal structural moment with its own history. In a materialist reading, modern Western childhood emerged as a structure and as a concept of a moratorium through the separation of children's and adults' worlds in the course of the dissolution of household economies, the exclusion of (first proletarian, then tending to include all) children from gainful employment, and the location of (first bourgeois, later tending to include all) children in the private space of the (generalising bourgeois) family and (increasingly including all children) the public school (Held, 2010, 13ff; Reimer-Gordinskaya, 2019, 117f). Historical discourse analyses also trace how elements of the dominant developmental psychology (techniques of observation, use of statistical measures as a basis for determining age-normalised stages, categorisation, placement and selection of children on the basis of tests, etc.) emerged from the 17th century onwards (Tervooren, 2008). They also show how the dominant developmental thinking combines with an androcentric epistemology as well as colonial racist and social Darwinist constructions (Burman, 2017, 238f, 243f, 246ff). While it is central, and initially sufficient, for a sociology of childhood to address societal reactions to, or ways of dealing with, the so-called developmental fact, it cannot ultimately ignore that development and childhood are not mere discourses (Prout & James, 1990, 25f), but a natural-historical and societally material reality. And in various variants of an alternative developmental psychology, it has been recalled that the criticism of developmental thinking, which is incidentally shared, does not apply to developmental psychology *per se*, but its mainstream (Woodhead, 2009;

Kleeberg-Niepage, 2018). Furthermore, it was shown that developmental thinking is sometimes wrongly identified with Piaget's work (Reimer-Gordinskaya 2018) and that it is rather the selective modes of reception of Piaget's work in the dominant psychology that should be analysed and criticised (Burman, 2017, 235ff).

Even more: from the perspective of alternative developmental psychology, the predominantly constructivist and discourse-analytical orientation of childhood sociology can be problematised in various respects: 1. it uses quantitative methods largely unquestioningly, although these tend to contradict its own premises (Mey, 2018, 234ff); 2. the *abstract* negation of universalist-normative developmental thinking in the emphasis on children as *beings* rather than *becomings* (Qvortrup, 1994; Hungerland, 2008) disperses its own object (namely the difference between children and adults) and makes it difficult to realise the claim to reconstruct children's perspectives and give them a voice (Mey, op.cit., 240ff); 3. the repression of children as developing *becomings* tends to be anti-emancipatory, because development for children (and adults alike) is a prerequisite for overcoming impediments (Markard, 2013); 4. the programmatic emphasis on child *agency* runs the danger of underestimating the real oppression of children in society as well as becoming blind to the danger of fitting harmoniously into the neoliberal mobilisation of subjects that accompanies the development of productive forces (Held, 2010, 27ff).

Materialistic (developmental) psychologies (cultural-historical school, Critical Psychology) open up ways out of contradictions and limits of in this sense *culturalistic* approaches in childhood sciences: 1. with the historical-empirical reconstruction of the psychic, the relationship between bio-physiological and societal-social dimensions of human agency can be determined and the opposition of nature and culture can be overcome (Maiers, 1993; 2019a); 2. with its action- and activity-theoretical foundations, the programmatic heuristic *agency* (Betz & Eßer, 2016) can be conceptually executed in such a way that children are understood as simultaneously being and becoming (*be[com]ings*: Mey, 2018, 241), who 3. carry out their (developmental) activity in social contexts and institutions in the historically specific form of the capitalist mode of production and life.

The implementation of a resulting programme of a materialistic-cultural theoretical research on the relationship between children and society is illustrated below and in conclusion.

On the societal agency of children

From a perspective following the cultural-historical school, it has recently been recalled that children's *understanding of society*, i. e. an extremely relevant subject area in terms of cultural theory, has largely remained a desideratum of (developmental) psychological research (Kölbl & Mey, 2018). While this diagnosis is generally shared from a subject-scientific perspective (Bandt, 2018; Markard, 2018), it should not be overlooked that children develop their

understanding of society within the framework of their social activity, which they carry out in concrete social contexts and institutions and starting from a specific position and situation in societal relations. In this sense, over a period of three years, the subject-scientific research project *KiWin* investigated how children act in intersectional power relations by means of participant observation in several day care centres. On the one hand, condition-meaning analyses were used to determine the way in which class and gender relations as well as racist and generational relations are represented in everyday life at the day care centre; on the other hand, with reference to the position and situation of the children, it was reconstructed to what extent they can (or could) gain the ability to act in restrictive or generalised forms in these relations, whereby cognitive, emotional and motivational dimensions were taken into account and, indeed, could be considered due to the chosen methodology.

Starting from circumscribed spheres such as economy and politics or from specific concepts such as tolerance, traditional research in developmental psychology, which nevertheless sees itself as cultural theory, constructs the understanding of society in the form of age-related developmental phases of their cognitive realisation on the basis of often standardised surveys far removed from the real world and ignoring the actions as well as the emotionality and motivation of the children (Barret & Buchanan-Barrow, 2005; van Deth et al. , 2007). Similar reductions characterise the relevant social psychological research on racial prejudice in early and middle childhood (Quintana & McKown, 2012). Its critique and reinterpretation, however, created partly illuminating guiding questions for *KiWin* (Reimer-Gordinskaya, 2018): Instead of trying to identify age-related cognitive developmental phases of prejudice on the basis of aggregated data from laboratory experiments, it was important to be attentive, on a case-by-case basis, to which social categories, stereotypes and prejudices children (re)construct in their social interactions in the life-world of daycare centres in the course of acquiring forms of restrictive agency in intersectional power relations.

The latter perspective proved fruitful in *KiWin*, for example, when analysing the use of age-related or generational categories (Reimer-Gordinskaya, 2020). Thus, the children's association of the category adult with power was revealed by the fact that some children did not easily classify the observers as adults because, unlike educators, they did not give orders except in dangerous situations, offered themselves as play partners and let the children take the lead in the interactions. And the fact that children tried to take advantage of their older age compared to others or to employ the categories of child and baby in a pejorative way in order to assert their interest in the use of a coveted object against other children can be understood as the realisation of a possibility of action in inter- and intragenerational power relations, through which these are simultaneously reinforced. In this context, generational power relations and their representation in the semantic meaning of social categories are understood as an implication of the above-mentioned enforcement of the structure of modern childhood. In a certain way, the fact that this structure includes the exclusion of children from gainful employment refers them to a non-position in class

relations, in whose conflictual dynamics they are caught nevertheless. For example, children suffered from being excluded from lunch when their parents owed payments (Reimer-Gordinskaya, op. cit.). On the part of the specialist staff, this practice is also justified by the fact that they and/or other parents feel it is unfair if some make the payments despite low income while others do not. From the children's point of view, they become victims of a conflict in which they can hardly intervene effectively from their position and situation in life. And the conflict carried out among adults at their expense, with reference to research on the transformation of class relations in neoliberally regulated capitalism, proves to be a reproduction of the competition between class fractions in the zones of precariousness and inclusion, illustrated there by the example of the competitive relationship between core industrial workforces and those employed in the form of temporary work (Brinkmann et al. 2006). In the context of day care centres, this conflict takes on an educationist flavour towards parents who owe payments – they are supposed to *learn to pay*. In addition to this classist dynamic, racist grounding contexts also come into play, insofar as the children concerned come from families with a migration history, who also (have to) live in precarious circumstances due to institutional discrimination. Starting points for changing this practice, which is directly problematic for the children, lie in the emotional ambivalence of specialist staff who feel sorry for the children. In the sense of the developmental figure and based on the definition of a common problem of action provided for therein, it can be possible to design alternative and solidary possibilities of action, such as the redistribution of leftover food, support in applying for funds from the *education and participation package* [*Bildungs- und Teilhabepaket*], or the medium-term strategy of advocating for a provision for children that is generally free of charge for parents, i. e. organised as a publicly financed common good. Such a practice would be evidence of a solidary workers' culture that counteracts both class factions and racist divisions.

Conclusion

In order to clarify the benefit of a subject-scientific perspective for cultural-psychological research into cultural structures of meaning and significance that are fundamental to experience and action, we have first determined the respective positions in this context in more detail in terms of their relationship to each other and possible connections: Cultural-Historical Theory, the Critical Psychology that builds on it, its understanding of psychology as a particular subject science, and cultural psychology, which sees itself not as subdisciplinary but as an overarching perspective.

Contrary to what culturalist constrictions of the meaning of "cultural-historical" suggest, Vygotsky's approach aimed at explicating human subjectivity in the unity of its natural-, societal- and individual-historical determinants from the objective necessities of the material life process. This historical-materialist paradigm of developmental theory decisively inspired the Critical-Psychological programme of gaining scientific basic concepts for a concrete-historical theory of

societal subjectivity through a "historical-empirical categorial analysis" of the natural and societal history of the human mind. By uncovering the social contexts of seemingly purely individual phenomena and the underlying overall societal conditions, such an analysis is able to critically sublate traditional psychology, which – with its personalising concepts and pacifying social technologies – is trapped in bourgeois ideology, and to contribute in a practical-emancipatory way to empowering a self-determined individual conduct of life.

The subject-scientific determinations of the subject essentially include overcoming the dichotomisation of the natural and the societal or cultural, which can be found both in the naturalistic-subjectless psychologies and in their subject-oriented critiques arguing in terms of cultural theory, by means of a concept of human nature qua societal nature gained in the reconstruction of psychophylogenesis/anthropogenesis – which constitutes the "human potentiality" (Tomberg, 1978) to form societies and to societalise individually in respective historical conditions. Also central is a decentred, materialistic concept of the subject, which is secured against emphatic notions of the omnipotence of the ego over external and internal reality, and which understands the individuals experiencing their world and themselves as bodily actors situated in their objective life circumstances and personal biographies. Such a practice-theoretical concept is eminently important to counteract any kind of objectivism, which is by no means limited to the naturalistic conditionality thinking of traditional mainstream psychology, but may also manifest itself in the form of degrading individuals to passive appendages or mere functions of societal-cultural systems. It is a matter of simultaneously understanding human behaviour in its objective determinacy by (natural and societal) conditions and the subjective determination about the conditions, i. e. the reality of people as practice. Human individuals are not causally determined in their behaviour by existing (historically produced) circumstances, but can consciously relate to them as societal object meanings and possibilities of action. The intentionality of human action comes to the fore in the practical possibility relationship of individuals to the world.

A decidedly subject-scientific, actual-empirical research with its methodological guidelines – discourse of groundedness, meta-subjective scientific framework of understanding, co-researcher principle, unity of comprehension and change, etc. – distinguishes itself through making a consistent switch from a supposedly uninvolved external standpoint to a generalised subject standpoint as the point of knowledge. In principle, this is capable of connecting with cultural-psychological research programmes that take a look at individual action and mental phenomena in their constitutional relationship to the artefacts, discourses and forms of life socially and culturally handed down in a specific societal-historical constellation. i. e. that examines these meanings of human life circumstances as results of and contexts of grounds for human action, thus starting from people as socially situated, reflexive and intentional actors and including the so-called others as producers of knowledge in their research settings.

A subject-scientific orientation of cultural psychology grounded in Marxist societal theory can thus prevent tendencies of certain discourses in the social

sciences and humanities (for example, of post-structuralist provenance) to use culture and socio-cultural imprinting as fuzzy omnibus terms for everything societal and the societal determinacy of human subjectivity by recognising cultural processes and forms as determined by the mode of production – the productive forces and relations of production – of a societal formation. The incorporation of advanced class theoretical and political concepts into the discussion of cultural psychology enables a differentiated theoretical explanation for the diversity of socio-cultural constellations characterised by intersectional structural relations of inequality, oppression and discrimination and the subjectively grounded action in contradictory life situations associated with them. As a product of human practice, and thus changeable on a historical scale, the societal structural relations determine the possibility spaces of personal agency – a fact that is easily glossed over in idealistic-social constructivist conceptions of culture.

In that materialistic way set in relation to each other, the concept of culture can widen the concept of society by a dimension relevant to action in that it opens up access to the perspective of the actors, the world- and self-understanding of social groups and the diversity and changeability of socio-cultural codifications of life worlds and subjectivities. In this respect, cultural theories refer to a level of theory formation and empirical research that is basically laid out in Critical Psychology with its concept of *meaning analysis*, but is not sufficiently differentiated. To achieve this differentiation, of course, systematically requires the further elaboration of a Marxist concept of culture, from which available cultural theories can be reinterpreted. From a subject-scientific point of view, it would be important to comprehend culture as contradictory, everyday practical patterns of meaning of the mode of production and life for societal individuals in such a way that, compared to the objective restrictions on action and self-acting impediments, expanded spaces of possibility for self-determined action open up for them.

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Placing semiotic formulations to the epistemological ground of psychology

N. Ekrem Düzen & Mete Sefa Uysal

Abstract

The increasing irrelevancy of reported results in psychology to their conjectures has been growingly well-documented. There is also a shift of emphasis from methodological to theoretical shortcomings. Inasmuch as the attention devoted to the replication crisis is justified, the call that methodological drawbacks are hardly addressable unless the theoretical base is fortified is equally warranted. In this paper, we intend to expound on our estimation that epistemological foundations of psychology are in need of dire reinforcement if our discipline should remain a bastion of knowledge production. We assert a twofold argument that (a) psychology has to free itself from verbal ambiguities and linguistic imperfections in order to relate its subject matter to its methodology and (b) for that reason, reinstate its subject matter in such a precision that conjectures and implications produced across subfields could be relatable and translatable to each other. In support of our argument, we attempt to identify epistemic conditions through which both parts of our argument could be sustained. For the first part, we consult semiotics to illustrate a way of discerning robust phenomena and thus establishing the validity of constructs. For the second part, we revisit the beginnings of the science of psychology to highlight the dead end we have currently been stuck in. We search for prerequisites of turning data points over subjective experience into objective information. In addition, the authors are well informed that none of the problems summarized in the literature nor the efforts towards resolving them cannot be considered independently from overarching sociopolitical influences and effective circumstances shaping research environments. Therefore, we take note of the present-day state of affairs corroding the ever-weakening tie between theory and methodology.

Keywords

theoretical ground, psychological constructs, method-methodology connection, semiotic bridge

1. Introduction

History of psychology is nearly equivalent to history of crises in psychology (Wieser, 2020). However, its relatively long history of crises rarely produced consensual improvement strategies elevating the status of the discipline to the

level of basic sciences, nor helped to formulate its main subject matter (Pryiomka & Clegg, 2020). It does not follow, however, that there are good examples or efforts to counter the corrosive flow of “publish or perish” dictum (for discussions on good research practices, open science, and replicability in psychology, see Banks et al., 2016; Nosek et al., 2022; Sassenberg & Dittrich, 2019; Vazire et al., 2022; Youyou et al., 2023). The recent literature on replication crisis is one significant endeavor to address the current link in the chain displaying the ever weakening power of psychology in mastering its *raison d'être* (Morawski, 2019). Despite ameliorative exercises, increasing irrelevancy of reported results to their conjectures continue to mark the major shortcomings of psychology (Scheel, 2022), echoed in a shift of emphasis from methodological to theoretical deficits (Eronen & Bringmann, 2021; Flis & van Eck, 2018). With a close examination of the succession of crises, one could suggest that most of the deep-seated issues in psychology, are indeed symptoms of a fragile intellectual and epistemological base of the discipline rather than methodological problems or technical inadequacies (Muthukrishna & Henrich, 2019; Wiggins & Christopherson, 2019).

Inasmuch as attention devoted to the replication crisis is justified, the argument that methodological drawbacks are hardly addressable without a fortified theoretical base is equally, if not more, warranted (Berkman & Wilson, 2021; Düzen & Uysal, 2022; Flis, 2019). It is evident that dissecting the methodological capability of psychology from its theory-building capacity would lead to a short-circuited understanding of epistemological problems. Doing so would eventually result in amplified procedural routines of singular studies, inevitably reducing methodical applications to mere technical operations. Recent criticisms on how mainstream research activities are conducted despite serious criticisms support the view that psychologists tackle the problem frivolously (see Berkman & Wilson, 2021; Borsboom et al., 2021; Gervais, 2021; Irvine, 2021). It is disconcerting that most psychologists do not engage with methodological problems beyond instrumental approaches specific to the scope of their current studies, worrying only about standardized methods and associated theoretical sketches (Oberauer & Lewandowsky, 2019).

In this paper, we intend to expound on our estimation that epistemological foundations of psychology need dire reinforcement if our discipline should remain a bastion of knowledge production (Düzen & Uysal, 2022). We present a twofold argument that (a) psychology needs to free itself from conceptual ambiguities and linguistic imperfections in order to relate its area of study to its methodology and (b) for that reason, reinstate its subject matter in such a precision that conjectures and associated evidence produced across subfields could be relatable and translatable to each other.

We will attempt to identify epistemic conditions through which both parts of our argument could be sustained. More specifically, we will consult semiotics (Glaz, 2017; Glaz et al., 2013) to illustrate usable ways to describe psychological phenomena, define pertaining concepts, and thus prepare the ground for establishing the validity of constructs. To illustrate our arguments, we will propose to refresh consciousness studies with an elaborated terminology by the

help of linguistics and, more generally, semiotics. We do not mean to put forward a formulation out of our own fancy, rather we will draw attention to the fact that determining the primary subject matter of a scientific discipline, such as consciousness in psychology, calls for collectively coordinated cooperative collaboration in order to achieve a consensual understanding of what it should deal with. We maintain that big questions should be taken care of concertedly as opposed to single-handedly as it is usually the case with private enterprises of individual researchers or insulated research teams.

The idea of collective collaboration is more about creating a synergetic consensus, however provisional that may be at a given moment, out of the combined efforts of heretofore unconnected scholars than about going with a series of slightly modified fragmentary studies even when interdisciplinarity or multidisciplinary is sustained. We argue that if psychology is to claim ownership of a research area investigating mental faculty, it has to define the basic phenomena that supposedly make the mind up such as cognition, emotion, motivation, and consciousness. Furthermore, psychologists must discern a similar understanding when talking with these terms. The dark irony is that it is utterly difficult to find two psychologists who could agree on such basic phenomena, neither separately nor, worse, in combination. Solomon Asch pointed out the problem of subject matter in psychology 70 years ago: "If social psychology is to make a contribution to human knowledge, it must freely look at its phenomena and examine its foundations. [...] Before we inquire into origins and functional relations, it is necessary to know the thing we are trying to explain." (Asch, 1952/1987; p. xv; p. 65). Psychologists long abandoned the due philosophical, linguistic, and semantic work of describing their subject matter and thus building the conceptual framework defining it, despite historically good examples. Consequently, the discipline has become a scattered crowd of dazzled conductors pretending to decipher a deep mystery despite having only superficial, if not defective, decoders.

In such a haze, going back to basics and looking for the point of departure where roads are diverged could be helpful. Semiotics, in this sense, has the potential to provide much needed groundwork to start any inquiry on mental phenomena. As being the science of meaning making (see Chandler, 2022 for a concise account) semiotics provide us with the tools of constructing a metalanguage to link phenomena with concepts through which researchers can build their workable conjectures (Ayer & Elders, 1974; Popper, 1962). To put it plainly, we will search for semantic prerequisites for describing phenomena by reference to linguistic constructs in such a way to arrive at a unified conceptual framework. The goal of this venture is to be able to talk about the same thing: obtain empirical data and translate it into objective (in the sense of replicably testable) information that could be useful in epistemological inquiries and thus knowledge production.

2. The Precarious Science-worker's Conundrum

The authors are well informed that none of the problems summarized in the literature nor the efforts towards resolving them, for that matter, cannot be considered independently from the overarching sociopolitical influences and circumstances shaping the research environment such as funding schemes, publication pressure, and precarity. In this light, one has to consider present-day state of affairs corroding the ever-weakening tie between theory and methodology (Karau, 2019; Nosek et al., 2012; Uysal & Düzen, 2022; Witkowski, 2020).

It seems that the theoretical preparation in most studies in psychology is usually done with compilations from ready-to-use packages that are in demand by the current literature. Existing elements of intellectual background are presented in their widely accepted forms without being questioned or discussed in detail, allowing researchers not to take the risk of (re)addressing the epistemic validity of the variables they work with. Well-known or potential loopholes in the theoretical model are eclipsed in a way that does not pose a threat to the research at hand. Methodological problems are usually associated with the concerns of deciding on the appropriate combination in the matrix of data types (quantitative, qualitative, narrative, etc.) and data evaluation systems (statistics, thematic classification, content analysis, etc.) (Szollosi & Donkin, 2021).

Intellectual preparation is devoted to the selection of variables and estimating the correlations between them, rather than establishing the link between the phenomena and the corresponding by prioritizing simplicity in formulating the research question, validity in measurement, and clarity in reporting. In other words, on average, most of the reported results do not add precision to the description of phenomena or definition of the concept of it. Comparably, studies that emphasize model-building are written with the belief that epistemological and methodological problems are largely eliminated. However, advanced model applications often result in selecting variables based on model assumptions, rather than purifying the definition of variables (Danziger, 1985). As Cronbach lamented on the same disappointment twenty years apart (Cronbach, 1975), model-appropriate hypothesis-forming instead of theory-building became the rule of thumb rather than exception, obviously hindering theoretical progress. Leaning excessively towards correlative techniques strips the method off its position as an integral component feeding the theory and, for that matter, pertinent epistemology. Hence, the opportunity of improving the idea or transforming the hypothesis-testing cycle into a knowledge-generation process decreases substantially (van Rooij & Baggio, 2021).

As research activity takes the shape of an automated procedure, establishing a productive method-theory interaction fails. The dynamic interaction between the methodology, which is the systematic discussion of how to transfer hypothetical reasoning and inferences to the process of generating empirical knowledge, and the method, which is the procedure of applying this discussion to the current study, is often lost amongst sentences of introductory textbooks.

Researchers usually focus on the method of the particular research they carry out at a given time rather than the methodological rationale of the discipline of psychology in its integrality. They are rarely able to get involved in the imminent relationship between method and methodology. This indifference results either in not linking the method to methodology or not being reflected in the study. The methodology is mentioned as if it is a pile of popular methods that do not speak to each other. When this is the case, deriving an increasing number of variables around the same theme and reporting the results of the correlations between these derivatives turn out to be an activity serving only the person doing the study (Flis & van Eck 2018). Thus, the literature loses its quality as a source of cumulative information suitable for the use of others and grows into a gigantic statistical table with no consequential outcomes. Such a literature creates a) disorientation in psychology as to what the discipline is good for b) distrust in scientific community as to what could be expected from psychology, and c) erosion in intra- and inter-disciplinary communication and collaboration.

On the other hand, individual researchers *per se* cannot be blamed for these current and potential problems given the levels and types of precarity, academic culture, financial policies, societal endorsement, and political repression. If a researcher, despite the negative socio-political and academic circumstances, spare some of their effort to address the method-theory problem and cares about the relationship between methodology and method, they have to face two crucial problems, one intellectual and one practical. Intellectually, putting forward something significant about the methodology requires a giant repertoire in its own right. Practically, they would have to struggle with limiting the scope of their research, losing their thematic focus, and falling behind the requisite number of publications. The former asks for shouldering a workload that cannot be taken on alone, and the latter jeopardizes their chances of an 'academic career'. Faced with these intertwined problems, researchers usually declare in their "limitation and future directions" sections that they wait for an imaginary group of researchers, which is impossible to encounter, to come along and solve the methodological and epistemological problems that concern them as well. The development of the conceptual framework is postponed to further work, preferably by others; hence, the dispossession of the theory-method problem deepens. In this twilight where personal concerns and scientific responsibilities are intermingled the method-theory problem is apprehended by an avoidance reflex that the individual researcher refuses to undertake, and the collective effort never arrives.

3. Fault Lines on the Intellectual Plane

It is remarkable that the number of studies dealing with a double contraction in the field of psychology, theoretical deficiency and methodological bottleneck (i.e., method-methodology jamming), is not proportional to the urgency of the problem. Despite the scarcity, it is nevertheless promising to have studies trying to identify the sub-factors, components, or possible reasons (e.g., Eronen &

Bringmann, 2021; Flis & van Flick, 2018; van Rooij & Baggio, 2021). Here we will refer to Eronen and Bringmann's (2021) study to give a short account of reasons of weaknesses in theory building in psychology. Basically, we will summarize their review, as they do, in three headings: 1) Absence of robust phenomena, 2) lack of validity/validation, and 3) difficulty of finding a causal relationship. Indeed, they do not claim that the theoretical problems consist only of these three topics. Instead, they highlight the need for in-depth studies in these directions and draw attention to the ongoing uncertainty about psychology's subject matter.

In this section, we address the main theoretical challenges drawing on the work of these researchers and then discuss possible solutions or enhancement suggestions in the next section.

3.1. Absence of robust phenomena

Robustness is a measure of whether the theories have the power to determine the boundaries of the phenomenon. Accordingly, there is a two-way relationship between the phenomenon and the theory developed to explain the phenomenon: a) the phenomenon should be able to be explained on the basis of theory, and b) there should not be many theories explaining the same phenomenon. In psychology, however, both theories' power to explain the phenomenon is weak and there are many theories related to the same phenomenon. For example, Darwin's theory of evolution can perfectly explain the phenomenon of evolution and natural selection, and there is no other scientific theory that is a candidate to explain evolution and natural selection other than the existing theory. In the field of psychology, we cannot easily think about a theory like that. Instead, the phenomena proposed by theories are often not supported by empirical evidence or, when the phenomena are supported by specific evidence, this evidence provides no clue as to which theory would be more explanatory—and therefore more valid.

Eronen and Bringmann (2021) argue that the theory of ego depletion, which was thought to be well-established in the literature and has remained popular for a long time and has led to many publications, is slowly faded away due to its weak or unreliable empirical supports and existence of many alternative theories. Similarly, psychological theories on stereotype threat, newborn imitation, and priming effects, which are thought to be well-established, either cannot explain their phenomena or these phenomena are explained by different approaches. Thus, the absence of a theory that can explain its phenomenon and that cannot be explained by alternative theories contributes to existing crises and does not help to determine the main research subject of psychology.

3.2. Lack of validity/validation

The reason for the lack of validity/validation, which is not reflected in the studies to the extent that it is emphasized in psychology education, is an ongoing negligence towards developing psychological constructs. Eronen and Bringmann (2021) argue that robustness is ignored despite the abundance of constructs in the literature. Having plenty of repetitive constructs related to the same theme (for example, perceived control) and the continuous production of new ones without attempting to improve the existing ones take the form of common scientific activity. The field of psychology grows into a discipline of unvalidated constructs and provider of measurement tools for those slippery fabrications. Researchers' emphasis on reliability over validity, citing other seemingly related studies as a tool of validity, and the ability to publish derivative constructs make this mediocrity a standard.

It is worth mentioning two more preparatory factors that psychology does not deal with sufficiently, hence, make construct validation difficult: *generative entrenchment* and *epistemic iteration*. Generative entrenchment means that after a construct is introduced, it can be widely used in many fields other than the output field. Psychiatric diagnosis categories, which not only psychology but also other disciplines frequently use, can be given as an example for generative entrenchment. In time, such defective constructs are seen indispensable due to the practical fact that other structures (other constructs, measurement tools, training and intervention programs, etc.) built based on this construct will also be affected. Thus, commonly used constructs are persistently circulated even though they are known to be weak or erroneous.

Epistemic iteration refers to constantly increased epistemic purity of a construct with new definitions that are getting more and more precise over time. Epistemic purity can be understood as the degree of power explaining the phenomenon with the same construct at an increasing rate and without the need for other constructs. For example, atom or electron constructs in physics are constructs with high epistemic purity in terms of explaining the phenomenon, although their initial definitions have undergone significant transformations over time. However, most constructs in psychology remain outside of similar epistemic evolutions.

3.3. Difficulty of establishing causal relationships

It seems that the theoretical and methodological development of psychology contingent upon to the revealing the causal relationships between psychological variables. Aside from the debate about which methodological processes are sufficient to establish causal relationships, there is another big problem that psychology needs to develop a solution. Although it is important to show the causal relationships between external variables and psychological variables, revealing the causal relationships between psychological variables is the main difficulty.

We can understand external variables simply as environmental stimuli, and psychological variables as units of processing these stimuli. Environmental stimuli also involve the internal environment of the organism (biological body, anatomy, brain, nervous system, etc.). Psychological variables, from sensation to perception, memory to attitude, emotion to belief, are all psychological responses and behaviors to the stimulus (responses, reactions, actions, echoes, reflections, representations, etc.). In that sense, external variables and psychological variables are poorly, if not at all, symmetrical. In other words, it is none other than our conjectures that make them related to each other. Such an asymmetry suggests that examining the correlation between a well-validated external variable (e.g., daylight duration) and a poorly validated psychological variable (e.g., ego depletion) would yield more reliable results than examining the correlation between two psychological variables (e.g., risk taking and ego depletion). Hence, we can predict that it will be relatively easy to establish a causal relationship between external variables and psychological variables, and it will be quite difficult to establish a causal relationship between psychological variables. Eronen and Bringmann (2021) suggest that establishing causal relationships between external independent variables and psychological variables can be considered a necessary condition, but not a sufficient condition for our discipline. They emphasize that since Wilhelm Wundt, psychology has not made any progress in overcoming this limit and remind that complex psychological processes such as thinking or feeling cannot be deduced from the correlations between external variables and psychological variables.

The cyclical feeding of the problems identified by researchers is one of the biggest obstacles to overcoming the epistemological and theoretical problems of psychology. In other words, the absence of durable phenomena, lack of validity/validation, and difficulty in finding a causal relationship, each grow from the negativity of the other, making it difficult to determine where to start solving the problem. The absence of durable phenomena paves the way for unvalidated constructs; unvalidated constructs make it difficult to find causal relationship; and the difficulty of finding causal relationship exhausts robust phenomena-explain possibilities.

Following Eronen and Bringmann, we maintain that linking a psychological phenomenon (such as risk taking) to a psychological variable (such as ego depletion) rather than linking an external phenomenon (such as daylight duration) to a psychological variable (such as, again, ego depletion) is of paramount importance. In the following sections, we will expand on this idea when we try to explicate why psychology should be the field of explaining psychological phenomena with reference to psychological variables and why studies explaining psychological variables with reference to external variables are destined to be unproductive – and do not make a science of psychology but something else.

4. Ontological Coordinates of Consciousness

In an attempt to establish a new paradigm for studying emotions, Lisa Feldman Barret (2017) attests that "... progress in science is often not answering old questions but asking better ones" (p. 14). She reviews existing theories of emotion and proposes a new approach endorsing that emotions are constructed in a similar way perception is eventuated against the question "what is this new sensory input most similar to?" (p. 7). When translated to Irvin Rock's language (1983) emotions are propagated answers to environmental questions in the sense of problems to be solved including questions arising from one's own inner milieu. In both perception and emotion, the organism uses past experience to guide itself to deal with the present situation and move forward to update its allostasis (Sterling, 2012) rather than restore homeostasis (Schulkin, 2003). Barret is not naïve to the huge literature on neural correlates of psychological processes, she nevertheless tries to establish a link between two psychological variables: receptivity of environmental events and associated emotions as allostatic responses to them. This way, she locates emotions not in the flesh (neural network) but in the interaction between the organism and its environment; that is, making sense of the sensory input and generating a corresponding response.

Inasmuch as Barret's approach helps to clarify the huge confusion around what emotions are, the discipline is still very far away from studying emotions like perception and cognition, let alone consciousness. Much less acceptable, we see no similar attempt in studies on motivation or, worse, connecting motivation to these basic mental faculties. Whether Barret's approach would be paid by due justice in studies of emotion is yet to be seen. What is certain is that studies in consciousness do not revolve around the interaction of the organism with its environment, but rather inside the individual's physical body and grant it a privileged position among all other mental states. The source of its distinguished status is said to be its inaccessibility to external observation, being both the means and ends of subjective experience in the same moment. Therefore, the attributed prominence of consciousness creates a hard problem. Notable researchers, too agree that introspection should not have a place in studies of consciousness, yet they admit that there is hardly a clear way of making research on consciousness sensible without referring to introspection (e.g., Seth & Bayne, 2022). The alternative term proposed to avoid it, interoception, helps no better as long as consciousness is looked for in the human brain (Nikolova et al., 2022).

This hard problem led psychologists and researchers from other fields to place consciousness into the brain, sometimes along with a little bit of larger neural network. This placement made it handy to work on the connections across external and psychological variables. There it is seen immediately that such are studies linking external variables to psychological ones, neglecting once again linking psychological variables to each other. At the end, we have an abundance of correlations between supposedly conscious experiences with an endless list of brain or nervous system structures, processes, and functions. Most of the time, these correlations are not even translatable to the vocabulary of psychology. The

explanation is nothing psychological but physical so much so that one need not to be a psychologist to do the work or make sense of the outputs.

What, then, blocks psychologists developing an understanding of consciousness that can be sought in interactions of the organism with its environment, as they do when studying perception and cognition? To put it differently, could there be alternative ways of defining consciousness in such a way that it yields itself to investigation without referring to neural correlates, brain parts, or chemical reactions? Could psychology search for consciousness by connecting psychological variables among themselves rather than to external variables?

4.1. From construct to concept

The use of the word consciousness in psychology is so imprecise that it cannot fulfill the function of a concept. Researchers hardly take into account its linguistic characteristics, historical background, or literary, artistic, and metaphorical implications. It seems that consciousness is never thought to be reprocessed to ascribe qualities of a construct. Rather, everyone understood that it is understood by everyone the way they understood. At the end, we neither have a good theory of consciousness nor a testable construct. That is why, in this section, we try to develop a proposal asserting that the transition from construct to concept follows a semiotic process that makes the semiotic work an intrinsic component of identifying robust phenomena. Then, later, we will go back to reflect on what had been lost in studies of consciousness by neglecting the semiotic homework.

We argue that one fruitful approach to take semiotic work into the center would be to consult social representations (see Bauer & Gaskell, 1999 for an outline of the approach). Even though a thorough discussion of the way semiotics is linked to social representations is beyond the scope of this chapter, we nevertheless think that this approach provides useful methods for describing robust psychological phenomena (see Veltri, 2013, 2015 for connections between semiotics and social representations).

It may not be a coincidence that Moscovici (1988) repeatedly invoked the same example given by Eronen and Bringmann (2021) in his efforts to explain social representations: *Atom*. Initially, atom was not a concept corresponding to an observed and identified object/phenomenon, but a construct proposed to correspond to an object that was thought to exist. Natural sciences insisted on calling the smallest unit of matter by the term atom. Physics empirically demonstrated that matter is composed of atoms, more or less in accordance with Democritus' design. In fact, atom as an object was neither indivisible nor the smallest unit, but it was historically convenient to express findings about the qualities of the constituent elements of matter. Physics continued to describe these constituent elements and explained its attributes through empirical evidence while preserving the construct of atom. Although its meaning expanded to other areas of life (art, music, literature, worldviews, etc.), the word atom differentiated

from every other meaning and became a basic term in physics. Thus, atom transcended its meanings in everyday language and settled in the discipline of physics as a concept corresponding to an ontological object.

Constructs are linguistic expressions built with the aim of converting them into concepts corresponding to the described or identified objects, regardless of surrounding nomenclature. In that sense, constructs are made up of words by stripping off their irrelevant connotations and denotations in order to appoint them the quality of a *term*. When supported empirically, *the term* enters into the terminology as a concept corresponding to an ontological object. Otherwise, terminology remains a set of words with high interference frequency – which is the usual case in non-specific use of language. Sporadic nomenclature exerts disproportionate power on the social sciences compared to natural sciences in terms of twisting the object under investigation and bending the information to be gained from this investigation.

Once constructs become concepts, we can give a pause for a while. If the concept can continue to describe and explain the object in a more precise way - as in the case of atom - we do not need to change terminology. But if the concept does not correspond well enough to the object, we need to go back and revise the construct and put forward the conditions under which the reconstructed construct can become a concept. As a matter of course, scientific activity starts from fiction and arrives at a concept; it is an effort to extract the phenomenon from the imagination of the researcher and expose it to empirical access.

4.2. The price of staying away from semiotics

Moscovici (1984) emphasizes that every social representation is embedded in a semiotic triangle and that it should be understood as a dynamic embeddedness. Briefly, the semiotic triangle shows the three components of making sense of the world and thus representing it. These components (see Figure 1.) are a) the signifier (linguistic expression), b) the signified (concept), c) the signifier/signified (object) (see Ogden & Richards, 1989; Kiran, 1990 for basic semiological terms; see Michon et al., 2008 for semiotic views of psychology).

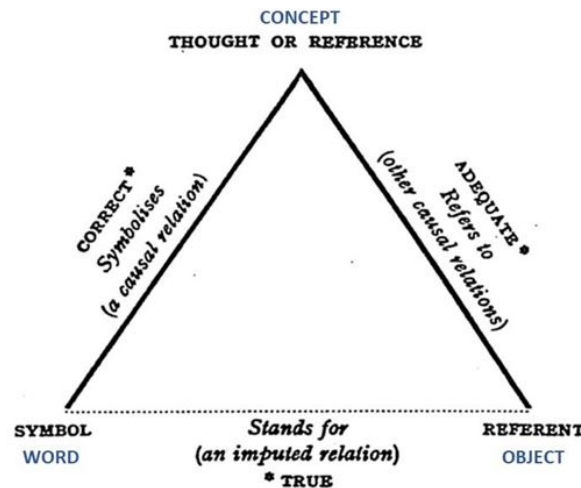


Figure taken from page 11, *The Meaning of Meaning: A Study of the Influence of Language upon Thought and of the Science of Symbolism*, 1923, was co-authored by C. K. Ogden and I. A. Richards, Magdalene College, University of Cambridge, Public Domain, <https://commons.wikimedia.org/w/index.php?curid=672318>

Figure 1

In another study Moscovici (1988) argues that once a representation is endowed with explanatory power, the only thing to do is to study the phenomenon that the representation points out to, and that there is no other way of producing knowledge. Jovchelovitch (2002) proposes to build the social psychology of knowing on the basis of dynamics of social interactions and cultural contexts following Moscovici's footsteps. Hence, she also shows why representations cannot be understood when left in the subject-object binary and not placed in the semiotic triangle. According to this reasoning, giving meaning to the object depends on a) being in relation with others and b) being able to develop a common code of signs that serve communication and social interaction. In other words, the object does not have meaning unless it is part of the common code of social communication and interaction. Reinterpreting these views, Voelklein and Howarth (2005) state that the binary opposition of subject-object is insufficient to fully grasp the social nature of representations and identify three dimensions of representation as 1) the object represented, 2) the subject who assumes the representation, and 3) the social group in which the subject positions itself while assuming the representation.

In line with these evaluations, we are looking for the *semiotic bridge* that connects the construct to the phenomenon in the transition from construct to concept. In this search, we argue that *the term as the specified name of the word* (or *phrase*) is the semiotic element that should be taken into account when claiming that a proposed concept really corresponds to the ontological phenomenon in question. To the best of our knowledge, the conditions of semiotic transition from construct to concept is not sufficiently emphasized in psychology and this lack of emphasis leaves the matter inconclusive as what to call a concept and what to call a construct. Following the example of *ego depletion*, we can argue that the researcher's construct is not subjected to a

semiotic work to establish its status as a communicative concept beyond the researcher's conjecture. Although the social representations approach does not explicitly mention *the term as the specified name of the word* or such is a semiotic component, we find it arguable that there is an abundance of implications within the approach that the function of the term summarizes the representation of a social or psychological object.

4.3. Semiotic geometry of the concept

A research activity based on words expressing schemes that are not objects and ignoring the transitivity from constructs to terms and then to concepts may result in the pursuit of things that are not objects. This risk is the same for words that refer to supernatural beings such as djinn, fairy, and demon as well as for words that express states rather than phenomena such as individualism-collectivism. In other words, a research activity that is initiated without establishing the transitions of construct-term-concept may end up producing meaningful statistical results about either a phenomenon that does not exist or a situation that does not qualify as a phenomenon.

Glaz (2017) argues that the semiotic triangle is insufficient for determining the metonymic and virtual meanings of linguistic expressions used as words or phrases. First, he finds that linguistic units are largely composed of expressions that are used interchangeable (metonymic) or denote the unrealized part of the reality (virtual). As examples of transpositional expressions, he gives the example of marking the object identified with the subject instead of the subject performing the action, as in the expression "Brussels said that" instead of "The European Union said that", or marking the subject who created the music even though the object of love is Mozart's music as in the example "I like Mozart very much". As for virtual expressions, he gives the examples of hurricane and composition. A hurricane is the form of a storm that reaches a certain but different peak each time, while a composition is a piece of music that is performed with a different interpretation each time. Both are critical expressions of more than just one part of reality that appears there and then. Glaz says that this feature of virtual expressions makes all virtual expressions also transitive. A hurricane extends to all storms that reach a peak; a composition extends to all interpretations of a piece of music that is performed differently each time.

The fact that linguistic expressions are transitive and virtual and that all virtual expressions are also transitive, prompts Glaz to reconsider the semiotic triangle. Glaz sees that unless the semiotic triangle is transformed into a tetragon, the semantic content of linguistic expressions cannot be completely determined. He says that we cannot know what we are talking about if we cannot determine which virtual and transitive forms of a linguistic expression we are talking about. He emphasizes that whether or not we define the boundaries of what we are talking about in a way that is clear to ourselves and others will definitely affect the limits of describing the phenomenon that will be the subject of scientific research. Glaz combines Jakendorff's (1983) distinction between "the real world,

the conceived world, the experienced world" and Bartmiński's understanding of "the interpretation of reality embedded in language" to build a fourth corner in the semiotic geometry (Bartmiński & Zinken, 2012; Bartmiński, 2013). This way, he proposes to update the semiotic triangle consisting of linguistic expression-concept-object into a tetragon of linguistic expression-conceptual structure-experienced world-real world.

We maintain that by adapting Glaz's quadrilateral semiotic model to the construct-term-concept transition, we can concretize the view we try to develop in this chapter. According to our version, terms that are names of constructions acquire the quality of concepts insofar as they are shown to correspond to the object in question. During the assembly of the construct, one or more of the transitive and virtual variants of linguistic expressions are selected and distinguished from the others. One of the dissected expressions are coined with a specific name that will indicate the holistic theme appropriate to the purpose of the construct. Hence, the term as the specified name of the linguistic unit is formed after eliminating raw linguistic expressions and before determining the concept corresponding to the object. Empirical studies conducted under this name acquire the function of the term (the linguistic unit in which the concept is to be expressed) when they describe and explain the phenomenon. When it becomes clear that the term can be used as a concept, connections of the term beyond linguistic connotations (e.g., imaginary or kinetic) are also included into the concept. In this respect, the concept is always broader than the term. The term is the cognitive-linguistic alias of the concept, and it is important to take extra care that the concept is not overshadowed by this alias.

In this regard, we have the possibility of reorganizing Glaz's geometry into the tetragon of linguistic expression-terms-concepts-objects. In this reorganization, the terms correspond to the selected and extracted contents of linguistic expressions, and the concepts referred by these terms correspond to the phenomena that the researcher investigates (see Figure 2). More concisely, concepts correspond to objects and terms to linguistic expressions.

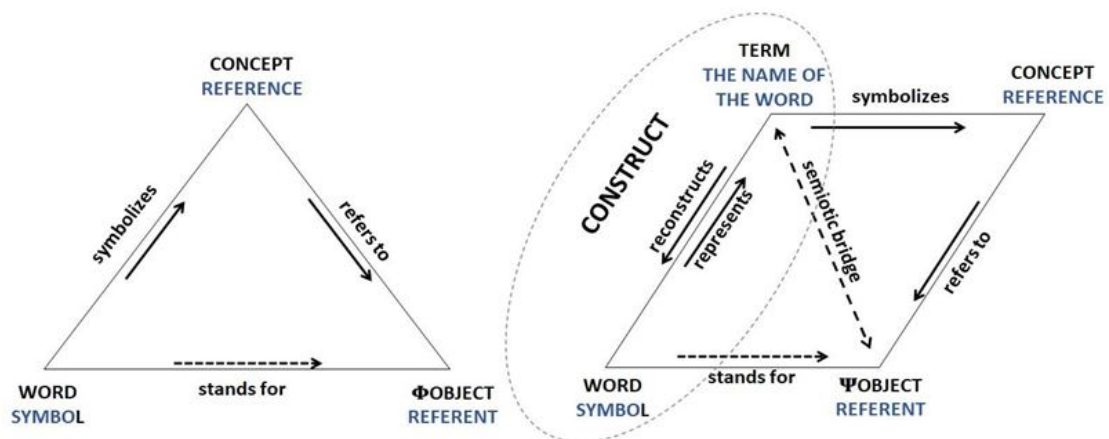


Figure 2

In our adaptation, the term is the semiotic bridge between the fact and fiction in the research activity that seeks to move from fiction to concept. When this semiotic bridge is not explicitly intended, the fact-seeking researcher may not know what they are talking about. The interlocutor, who is addressed by the researcher but who is not aware of this semiotic bridge, may not be able to find the meaning of what they hear.

We may imagine that the proposed semiotic bridge is a constant headache for social sciences, though it can also bother natural sciences time to time. Since the research subjects of natural sciences are external objects including laws of nature, historically it has been considered to be unaffected by human imagination. In this respect, living beings in general and the biological equipment of human beings in particular are seen as external objects. Natural sciences may have the comfort of using more direct quotations from existing linguistic expressions and neglecting most of transitive or virtual variations when defining concepts associated with external objects. Although the study of quantum mechanics nowadays is confronted with the possibility that the presence of an observer may affect the phenomenon under study, it may not be a top priority in the natural sciences to observe construction-terms-concept transitivity. From a theoretical point of view, it can be argued that observing this transitivity is a necessity, but from a practical point of view, we can think that the methodology of investigating external objects mitigates the effect of this neglect at least to some extent.

In terms of social sciences, on the other hand, neither the constitution of research subjects nor the methodology are strong enough to bear such a neglect. The phenomena sought by social sciences are not to be found *free* in nature. They are all found in human interaction with the living or non-living elements of the environment, including one's own inner milieu. Social sciences have nothing to say about the non-interactive human being. The non-interacting human being, like all external object-phenomena whose ontology is not changed by human imaginative or linguistic activity, is the subject of research only and exclusively for the natural sciences.

5. Epistemological Coordinates of Consciousness

We can illustrate the necessity of the bridge of term in the semiotic geometry with an exercise that helps to define consciousness in the form of a robust phenomenon. In this exercise, we deliberately avoid saying anything new about consciousness. We traverse the breadth of the literature on consciousness by drawing on Van Gulick's (2014) entry on Consciousness in the Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy. In a reductionist way, we try not to go beyond emphasizing the importance of appealing to semiotic geometry.

In the study of consciousness, we may speak of three main approaches that develop independently of the researchers' trained disciplines of origins. The first approach (the materialist view) argues that consciousness must ultimately arise in the course of neural activity. The second approach (the panpsychic view) claims

that consciousness should be considered as one of the basic elements of nature such as matter, mass and energy, and that human consciousness is a share of this basic element of nature. The third approach (empiricism) says that consciousness is an illusion, just like visual illusions, and that in order to understand consciousness we need to study the processes of illusions. All three approaches ultimately look for consciousness under the skin of the individual human being, especially in the brain and its neural activities.

All three approaches, which have produced most of the literature on consciousness, insist that the difficulty of the problem lies in the fact that a) the experience of consciousness is subjective and b) subjective experience cannot be detected in the workings of objective matter. None of these approaches, however, goes back to one of the basic tenets of the organism and its environment: The interaction between the distal and proximal stimuli (Flach & Holden, 1998; Gibson, 1967). In fact, Bartley (1982) gives an exact example of why it is important to agree on terms which are meant to be used in building constructs which would be used in describing the associated phenomenon. More recently, Brosch et al. (2010) reemphasizes the significance of working with the concepts of distal and proximal stimuli in emotion research. They assert that, without a clarified terminology there is no way of studying emotions in the sense that emotions are responses not to external stimuli which are outside of the organism but to distal stimuli which are representation of the external stimuli by the organism.

To put it differently, consciousness is not understood in psychology the way perception, cognition, or emotion is understood. The reason why emotion is entered the picture more recently may hold true for consciousness as well. Finally some researchers (e.g., Barrett, 2017) came to the understanding that emotions, too, are about organism's preparedness to receive external stimuli (work on distal stimuli) and, again, preparedness to react to distal stimuli on the basis of its representation (proximal stimuli) which is made up of a complex repertoire of learned responses. Such an understanding made possible to fine tune the terminology in describing emotional phenomena and thus what we should understand from the term emotion in emotion research (Shaffer et al., 2022). Consciousness, on the other hand, is still a crude word without irrelevant transitive and virtual extensions are eliminated and without the transitivity between constructs-terms-concepts are taken into account. Therefore, we have the word but not the term of consciousness which is taken to be the concept of the phenomenon of consciousness.

Does psychology have to search for consciousness under the human skin? Or could the discipline begin this search by placing the elements that are thought to mark the phenomenon of consciousness in their proper place, such as in a semiotic geometry? This exercise gives us the opportunity to argue the following: If the psychodynamic school had placed self and consciousness in person-environment interactions including interpersonal relations, instead of in the subjective psyche, we would be talking about a completely different psychology today. We could have placed consciousness in semiotic geometry, thus paving the way for describing other related phenomena as well, finally elevating the

concept of the psychological phenomena to a solid position in the history of science.

We should also emphasize the importance of semiotic geometry by reminding us that semiotically unprocessed linguistic expressions often do not correspond to psychological phenomena and may even contain elements that have nothing to do with describing phenomena. It would not be an exaggeration to say that studies in voluminous fields such as emotion or personality mostly rely on factor analyses of word lists and correlations between variables derived from these analyses. The information on emotions or personalities produced by researchers working in what are thought to be the most ambitious fields of psychology are more situational than factual. Moreover, this way of working, in which the robust phenomenon is neglected, is open to the arbitrary shaping of the researcher and closed to independent audits. It is in this light that one should evaluate what went wrong in the personality studies of Hans Eysenck, who died in 1997 as the most cited researcher after Freud and Piaget (O'Grady, 2020).

Concluding Remarks

Perhaps psychology's inability to give up the idea of dispositions (eventually giving rise to essentialist constructs and thus essentialist variables in many sub-fields like clinical, developmental, and social) should be linked to the fact that – in addition to sociopolitical factors – psychology considers itself as obliged or condemned to discover free-roaming objects in nature. That could be the reason why increasing numbers of psychologists are now working in fields derived from biology such as neurology, physiology and endocrinology. In these fields, psychologists have the opportunity to examine the relationships between external variables and psychological variables. Doing so, they believe that they are accepted scientifically to the extent that they can link psychological variables to external variables. Especially if they can assign essentialist qualities to psychological variables, they think that they have raised the scientific status of psychology.

The advantages of submitting essentialist constructs as concepts are many. As soon as one says *disposition* or *trait*, an imaginary ontological field emerges. Once this ontological field is taken as an unquestioned axiom, an unlimited horizon opens before psychology from which countless variables can be derived, from consciousness to the self, identity to personality, individualism to collectivism, emotion to pathology.

However, there is no methodological basis for saying that a study without reference to an external object cannot be scientific. Psychology is the discipline of being able to work with the variables that remain after external variables are removed from the equation – as long as the constructs are built in a way that is suitable for capturing the phenomenon. Attempts to construct psychological variables by resorting to non-essentialist constructs are rare in our discipline. The work of Jack Martin and his colleagues, who draw attention to the productive relationality of the construct of personhood rather than the futile essentialism of

the construct of personality, exemplifies that such constructions are possible (Martin, 2015; Martin & Bickhard, 2012; Martin et al., 2010). Neither should we neglect studies that examine how personhood is constructed in collective relations (see Hammond, 2021 for examples in this direction).

It is necessary to re-position psychology as a discipline able to describes and explains psychological variables in such a way to explain psychological acts and actions not by including but by eliminating external variables from the equation. Consciousness is not a phenomenon that psychology can study by asking what consciousness is mimicking the question of what atom is. Defining and explaining consciousness can only be achieved by building a construct that is capable of encompassing the boundaries of the conjectured phenomenon. Any activity to the contrary would be a fake epistemology on an imaginary ontology.

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Problematizing the power to name in psychology

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Abstract

Naming things has a special role in every science. The power to name subjectivity determines what can count as useful objects of study and how we think about those objects. In psychology, like other sciences (social or natural), this power to name is not shared, evenly distributed, nor inhere in every single psychological scientist. It is understandable that only a few psychologists may have that power to name subjectivities and serve as judges of objects worthy of study at any point in time. However, this power tends to be held by only White male psychologists at certain institutions. Thus, epistemic agency is ascribed to the White male psychologists and epistemic centre status assigned to their institutions and languages. In this paper, I problematize this power to name and locate it within a certain sub-population of individual scientists, institution, publication process, language of publication, and internalization of lack of that power to name among psychological scientists in the majority of the world. Thus, one cannot blame the privileged few when the majority willingly accepts, condones, or expects the power to name by the privileged few. I seek to decolonise the minds of the marginalised to reject their subservient role in knowledge production. Ways of opening access to this power are recommended.

Keywords

democratising, epistemic power, hegemonic psychology, power to name, subjectivities

Introduction

Knowledge production and dissemination are key to maintaining wheels of the higher education systems oiled across the world. One way to create new knowledge is through categorization that enables researchers to name subjectivity or objects of study along with its associated properties or characteristics (Lerner & Lomi, 2018). Naming, therefore, has a special role in every science. More importantly, the privilege or power to name subjectivity determines what counts as useful objects of study as well as how we think about those objects. They also become the new lens through which other researchers and practitioners see the world; thus, naming subjectivities transforms how the world is understood and perceived if such categories or concepts become widespread in their usage. It is

also important to understand that without categories or concepts, principles (relationships among concepts), laws (principles valid in all possible situations), and theories cannot be built up (Champagne, 2015; Seel, 2012). Thus, the structure of scientific knowledge or the components of science knowledge is such that if no categories are created and named from verifiable data about the world (facts), we are left helpless when studying relationships among variables (which are empirical concepts or constructs) that form the basis of much of our research in behavioural and social sciences including psychology (Champagne, 2015). Indeed, concepts are “the building blocks of thoughts” that influence the processes of “categorization, inference, memory, learning, and decision-making.” (Margolis & Laurence, 2022, para. 1). But these concepts should also conform to some standards to deserve a place in science. For this reason, recommendations have been made about the quality criteria of a good concept in science (Gerring, 1999; Margolis & Laurence, 2022; Seel, 2012) as well as the process of developing a good concept (Podsakoff et al., 2016).

Indeed, the process of categorization is both cognitive and social (Lerner & Lomi, 2018). Thus, it often results from lengthy process of negotiation and contention among competing perspectives or views. An example is the so-called *Pluto controversy* in which International Astronomical Union (IAU) decided to exclude *Pluto* as a planet and redefine it as a dwarf planet (Hannan, 2010; Shiga, 2006). The more difficult question is: who names or has the power to name things in science? To a large degree, life sciences, chemistry, physics, and health sciences have established standard systems for naming things (Kennedy et al., 2005; Leigh et al., 1998; World Health Organization [WHO], 2015). In the sciences with established naming systems, there is often the issue of who serves as gatekeepers to grant access to the power to revise the naming standards or the formulate new ones. Thus, the mere existence of a naming standard does not mean that every academic has equal access to that power, talk less the power to create new systems. For instance, Deikumah et al. (2015) examined and described the bird naming systems by Akan people (the numerical majority ethnic group in Ghana) in terms of its divergence from the mainstream bird naming system in biology. Though they argued that the Akan naming system is akin to the mainstream nomenclature, it also created the impression that the Akan nomenclature is not to be valued but only in its association with the mainstream nomenclature (Deikumah et al., 2015). This shows that there are still issues of access and distribution of the power to name in the life and physical sciences.

There are no established standards or guidelines for naming in the behavioural and social sciences. Thus, behavioural and social scientists tend to retain greater power to name and grant recognition to names created by other academics in the field. The situation is no different in psychology. On the issue of naming, Leary (1995, p.267) argues that psychologists are compelled to “construct and convey our understanding of things through the use of terms previously reserved for other things, on the basis of some perceived or conjectured similarity” and psychologists often “refuse to accept that this sort of cross-naming and knowing-by-comparison is inevitable”. Despite this, psychologists cannot deny the fact that a large portion of what we know and

think in the psychology appears to be underpinned by cross-naming and knowing-by-comparison (Leary, 1995). The implication is that Leary (1994) seems to be admitting was that psychologists have no rule at all to guide the naming of concepts or categories. This is because the metaphors used are chosen by the scholar and the decision-making process is not known to anybody, sometimes not even to the scholar doing the naming. Notwithstanding, there are a few attempts to create a classification system to name things in psychology. For instance, Montero and León (2007) attempted to provide a naming system for research methods used in psychology.

Gerring's (1999) discussion about what constitutes a good concept in the social sciences, for instance, failed to address the question of the naming conventions used in the social sciences. Rather he argued for the use of a criterial framework consisting of the following as a guide to developing a good concept in the social sciences including psychology: 1) familiarity, 2) resonance, 3) parsimony, 4) coherence, 5) differentiation, 6) depth, 7) theoretical utility, and 8) field utility (Gerring, 1999). The question about how to name the concept was left to the whims and caprices of the social scientist. This creates room for scientists in psychology to have the power to create categories to represent subjectivities and label them. For instance, why was Skinner box so-named but not labelled as "rat box"? To respond by saying that Skinner "invented" leads to murky waters as one cannot understand why Puzzle box was so-named instead of Thorndike box. Thus, different rules seem to apply at each instance reducing the capacity to have uniformity in the naming process. However, the inability of academics in psychology from the majority of the world to create and name categories cannot be pinned down only to this lack of naming conventions or the power of the gatekeepers. This is also due to a lack of effort to develop new categories that meet most of the Gerring's (1999) criteria for quality concepts in the social sciences. I shall return to this issue of inability of academics from the majority of the world (AMWs) to create and name categories again.

You might argue that the lack of uniformity in naming in the social sciences or its constituent disciplines allows for the flexibility required to manoeuvre the difficult tasks of naming categories or concepts in the social sciences. However, this also allocates power to a few gatekeepers to recognise or deny the concept or category even if the category or concept itself meets the eight (8) criteria Gerring (1999) recommended. This power held by some gatekeepers relates to their role in gatekeeping publication and dissemination of new ideas. For others, the power to gatekeep lies in their ability to determine what is worthy of teaching by way of curriculum design and prescribing texts (articles and books) for teaching. Thus, it is through the publication, dissemination, and teaching of new ideas that enables those ideas to enter into the realm of normal science (see Kuhn, 1970) or becoming canonized or established in a discipline.

In the rest of this article, I problematise this power to name and locate it within a certain sub-population of individual scientists, institution, publication process, language of publication, and internalization of lack of the power to name among psychological scientists of the majority of the world. I argue that a sub-population of psychological scientists who happens to be White males and have

attended or are affiliated with a limited number of institutions of higher learning in the West tend to have this power to name while the publication process tends to strip authors who are part of the disadvantaged majority off the power to name. Lastly, I also contest the internalization of the epistemic de-agency by the AMWs as being complicit in this process of granting to the privileged few the power to name. I also suggest ways of accessing this power to name among academics from the majority of the world.

Uneven distribution of the power to name

A good place to start the uneven distribution of the power to name is to consider studies that have identified eminent psychologists. Two of these critical studies are Haggbloom et al.'s (2002) study of the 100 most eminent psychologists of the 20th Century and Diener et al.'s (2014) of eminent psychologists of the modern era. In this study, Haggbloom et al. (2002) used three quantitative variables (i.e., journal citation frequency, introductory psychology textbook citation frequency, and survey response frequency) and three qualitative variables (i.e., National Academy of Sciences membership, election as American Psychological Association [APA] president or receipt of the APA Distinguished Scientific Contributions Award, and surname used as an eponym). They generated a composite score to rank 100 most eminent psychologists of the 20th century. Twelve years later, Diener et al. (2014) also published a similar work that used three criteria (citation metrics, textbook page coverage, and major awards) to rank 200 most highly recognized psychologists. In the list that they produced (Diener et al., 2014; Haggbloom et al., 2002), one can find many of the well-known figures in psychology for the work they have done. This also described a list of psychologists who have held the power to name. I am not in any way say that their work did not deserve recognition; it rather illustrates that a few persons in psychology has always held this power to name things in the discipline.

Equally important studies to consider in this discussion are Cattell's (1906) publication of the *American Men of Science* and the one by Furumoto and Scarborough (1986) in which they attempted to describe further the 22 women psychologists who were among the 4000 persons described in Cattell's (1906) *American Men of Science*. Cattell (1906, p. v) included persons in his biographical directory on the basis of the person's contributions to the advancement of pure science or "membership lists of certain national societies". Even though this is about every know field of science at the time, Cattell (1906) could only identify 22 women psychologists. Thus, taken together these studies suggest that there has been significant underrepresentation of women in psychology and at the core of power to name. However, recent studies suggest that women are making progress in psychology (see Diener et al., 2014) but they do not have the same power and status compared their male counterparts (Clay, 2017; Eagly & Miller, 2016).

It is fair, therefore, to say that, in psychology, like other sciences (social or natural), this power to name things is not shared, evenly distributed, nor inhere in

every single psychological scientist. Studies on prominence in psychology illustrate that that only a few psychologists may have that power to name subjectivities and serve as gatekeepers or judges of objects worthy of study at any point in time (Diener et al., 2014; Haggbloom et al., 2002). However, this power tends to be held by mostly White male psychologists at certain institutions (Diener et al., 2014; Haggbloom et al., 2002). For instance, there were more male psychologists in both lists than there were female psychologists (Diener et al., 2014; Haggbloom et al., 2002). Again, Diener et al. (2014) found that most of the psychologists on their list work or worked at Harvard, Stanford, University of Pennsylvania, University of Michigan, and Yale. Besides, a majority of them were from the US, implying that English language was the means of conceptualization and dissemination of the ideas (Diener et al., 2014; Haggbloom et al., 2002; Ong & Ochoa, 2022; Tindle, 2021). However, there were no non-White psychologists (Diener et al., 2014; Haggbloom et al., 2002) and perhaps the same can be said about other categories of persons such as people of different sexual orientation and persons with disability. Thus, epistemic agency is ascribed to the White male psychologists and epistemic centre status assigned to their institutions and language (e.g., Oppong, 2019a; Yankah, 2012). However, one cannot blame them for their actions and consequences of their actions. This is because they must have a front to lead every discipline (Oppong, 2013).

When gatekeeping is viewed in terms of editorial control of the dissemination channels (journals or similar outlets), a pattern similar to the distribution of eminence appears. In addition to the fact that the power to name is located in a certain sub-population of individual scientists (White males), universities (Ivy league or top universities), and language of publication (English language), publication process also restricts this power to persons associated with institutions (universities and language). In fact, the gatekeeping is at its peak during this process. For instance, we know that women outnumber men in psychology, but women do not have the same power as men at the upper echelons of the discipline including editorial boards (Clay, 2017; Eagly & Miller, 2016). Recently, Palser et al. (2022) have shown that, among top 50 journals in psychology and neuroscience worldwide, 76% of psychology journals and 88% of neuroscience journals had over 50% of editors being male whereas only 20% and 10% of the psychology and neuroscience journals respectively, had about the same number of female editors as male editors. Again, they found that US-based academics outnumbered those from other regions as editors in both psychology and neuroscience journals (Palser et al., 2022). Power wielded by journal editors is so enormous that we determine what ideas get published or do not get published. For African authors, they are even instructed on the tone of language they can use, refusal of which can mean one's ideas are not published. As Yankah (2012) has indicated, the African scholar must be a good boy or girl to get published. And by good boy or girl, Yankah (2012) meant the African academic must be prepared to present his or her arguments in a manner that makes the editors comfortable.

In a study of Science Citation Index Expanded (SCIE, 1900–2015), Social Sciences Citation Index (SSCI, 1900–2015), and Arts and Humanities Citation

Index (A&HCI, 1975–2015), Liu (2017) reported that nearly 97% of the papers in SCIE, 95% in SSCI, and 73% in A&HCI were in English. This shows the dominance of the English language in the publication process or in naming things in the social and behavioural sciences including psychology. Besides, non-English speakers are often rejected at higher rates than native English authors and there is over-rejection of studies from samples from the majority of the world that have failed to replicate core psychological findings (Tindle, 2021). Even though it has been demonstrated that psychology research tends to neglect the majority of the world (Arnett, 2009; Thalmayer et al., 2021), it is more accurate to say that it does neglect not only the majority of the world in terms of research participants but also the publication process as well. Thus, the majority of the world is neglected in participating in the research process from mere participation as respondents to not being able to publish in non-English languages to being denied or denying themselves the right to name things in psychology.

Often, there are arguments that translation can be a solution to the language barrier. To this, Kurt Danziger, in an interview with Adrian C. Brook (1995), argued that:

Some kind of translation, of course, can be achieved but I (Kurt Danziger) think that one's grasp of the alien concepts remains quite tenuous and is not to be compared with the absolutely taken-for-granted character which the categories of one's own culture have. You need a paragraph perhaps to express something that you say with one word because you have to supply some of the connotations which these words have for us (p.12).

It is safe to say that the publication process tends to strip authors who are part of the disadvantaged majority off the power to name. The English language, being the dominant language of publication, also forces such authors to think in terms of a language without the taken-for-granted contexts and assumptions. This reduces the ability of non-native English authors to truly “speak” about things they wish to and remain authentic to the English language. There are some concepts and ideas that are not directly translatable into the English language from languages from the majority of the world. Thus, to be compelled to write in English forces one to not do justice to issues one writes about. There are cases of where non-native English speakers first think in their native languages before they translate into English, implying that some meanings are lost in the translation.”

Complicity of the less privileged

To begin this section, I ought to own up and openly communicate my positionality. I write this section of the paper as an African scholar and thinker educated in Africa; more specifically, I am located in Botswana, with a Ghanaian background, having lived in Liberia and travelled extensively through La Côte d'Ivoire as well as having interacted with some people from Eritrea, The Gambia,

Nigeria, Sierra Leone, Tanzania, Kenya, Malawi, Uganda, Zambia, Lesotho, Rwanda, Niger, Afghanistan, South Sudan, Cameroon, Tunisia, South Africa, and Eswatini. I acknowledge that this position in space and time and other areas of self-awareness may have a bearing on my outlook, biases, and/or worldview. Thus, there may be some missed opportunities (due to my positionality) to present a very nuanced discussion in this section that may be applicable to all AMWs in the same way.

Previous attempts to discuss the lack of power in knowledge production have been done from this through confrontation, consciousness raising, and challenging oppressive power (Ake 2012; Ndlovu-Gasheni, 2013; Nwoye, 2015). While it is important to decolonise institutions that perpetuate this uneven distribution of power in knowledge production, it is equally crucial to decolonise the minds of the marginalised. This is because their own actions and attitudes to contribute to their marginalisation. Thus, I contribute to the decolonisation scholarship from a different viewpoint that focuses on decolonising the minds of the marginalised to reject the subservient role they play in knowledge production and dissemination. To another way, I seek to address decolonisation at level of the individual researcher in the majority of the world rather than at the level of the institution. This is because it will take both changes in the institutions and behaviour of researchers to be able to gain and share the power to name among the underrepresented. Therefore, I approach the need to decolonise differently, and I adopt the perspective that AMWs are complicit in their marginalisation (Oppong, 2019a, 2022b). I generally maintain a position consistent the view that “when the coloniser is long gone, the once colonised are maintaining the exploitative systems by their own attitudes, cognitions, and actions, without realising it.” (Oppong, 2019a, p. 294). It also appears that many AMWs seem to possess a metacolonial cognition “a sense of self or self-knowledge among members of formerly colonised societies that represents the self as inferior, inherently dangerous, weak and less capable compared to members of the societies that perpetrated the colonisation or those who are like them.” (Oppong, 2022a, p.185). While it is true that institutional persistence generates metacolonialism through an application of de facto power (Oppong, 2022a) continues to impact metacolonial cognition, AMWs themselves continue to participate in this vicious cycle. Thus, the less dominant group in the Knowledge production are complicit to allow the conditions to prevail.

I have described epistemic agency as “the ability to engage in and to create for oneself systematic knowledge to meet one’s needs” (Oppong, 2017, p.9) and presented epistemic de-agency as the conceptual opposite of epistemic agency (Oppong, 2019a). In this regard, I argue that

it is not entirely the fault of the current bearers of the “truth” in psychology to deny the African part of the intellectual space to participate in the evolving discourse in the various subfields of psychology. Africans themselves continue to internalise and pass on such a state of mind to the next generation of Africans (Oppong, 2019a, p. 293).

The existence of metacolonial cognition together the internalization of the epistemic de-agency by the AMWs make the underrepresented complicit in this process of granting to the privileged few the power to name. In other words, one cannot blame the privileged few when the majority willingly accepts, condones, or expects the power to name by the privileged few. Without the willingness to accept, condone or acquiesce to one's marginalisation, it is very difficult for any person to have the power to subjugate another. It is, therefore, important to understand that the less privileged in the knowledge productions allows that to happen in the first place because they do nothing per se to correct the wrong.

How do the AMWs contribute to their marginalisation? First, many AMWs are too afraid to even try to name subjectivities in the discipline. They believe that they do not have any right or authority to do so. They deny themselves the epistemic agency to name things in the discipline of psychology. In other words, they are afraid to name things for fear of rejection. This fear of rejection often stems from a lack of understanding of the history of the discipline of psychology. There is often a misconception about what one needs to do to name things as many persons who name things in the discipline are often advocates of their own idea (Oppong, 2022b). Related to this fear is, sometimes, a genuine lack of competence on how to name things in the discipline. Many AMWs do not know how to start and from where to start even if there is a desire to partake in the process of naming subjectivities in the discipline. This lack of competence leaves them unwillingness to try. The technical know-how is critical as it builds one's confidence to want to name things. However, this assertion may not apply to every scholar in the underrepresented groups. For instance, researchers in places like Russia, Japan, China, South Korea have produced some of the latest innovations in research primarily in the natural sciences. The leading role Chinese scientists have played and continue to play in COVID-19 research is a case in point. In spite of this, one may argue that their innovations in natural sciences have been made possible because of the very existence of naming conventions that somewhat makes it possible to innovate and name the innovations. It is, however, difficult to spot the same trend from these countries in the social and behavioural sciences. It is important to note that, despite the innovations in the natural sciences, scholars from these countries are still underrepresented in both the natural and social sciences.

Similarly, AMWs are often imitative in their research (Yankak, 2012). Adair (1999) has argued that often the "first" psychologists in the colonial regions obtained their psychology education abroad and upon their return teach and study psychology in the manner in which they were taught by their psychology professors. Thus, you often see AMWs continuing in the line of research they were exposed to during their graduate studies in the West. Thus, the AMWs tend to use the same methodologies the learned to investigate the similar problems they learned. This leaves them to only collect data on established constructs to test existing theories in ways that do not advance the constructs nor the theories. Consistent with this, Yankah (2012) argues that African research is often to be too descriptive, data-driven and lacking theoretical or conceptual grounding. Thus, they collect on existing constructs and analyse

without much conceptual contribution to the discipline. However, the power to name goes to the people who contribute conceptually to the discipline. Perhaps, it is apt to say that African and other AMWs have resigned themselves to being standard-followers and learners instead of standard-creators and knowers (Oppong, 2019a; Ssentongo, 2020).

Sometimes, some AMWs defy all odds to name subjectivities. However, such “names” are rejected by both Western and AMWs. In the case of Africa, one tends to encounter the unwillingness to include African content in the psychology syllabi created and implemented by African psychologists for African students (Oppong, 2016, 2019a). While some believe there are no content of note for inclusion, others believe such contents are non-existent altogether (Oppong, 2019a). This implies that where there are even alternative African models or concepts, such ideas are never given the chance to germinate in the first place. While the instructors or lecturers may be comfortable with lack of local content in her or his instructions, the students who are the next generation psychologists have the right to know about these contents to further develop them.

Sharing the power to name with the privileged few

To share the power to name subjectivities in the discipline of psychology or any discipline with those who possess such power is not a call for a revolution. This is because there are no human groups on earth when presented with this power who will not take it. Thus, this idea of sharing the power is not to blame anyone nor to fight anyone. Those who wish for revolutions should consider the idea of creating their own ecosystem of higher education to compete with the extant higher education ecosystem as their solution. You cannot demand equality from people who created a system by engaging in a battle to wrestle power from their hands and place such power in yours. That will be replacement of one power with another with the same effect on those who once had the power. In other words, seeking to share the power to name things should be seen from the perspective of what the one who claims to be marginalized to do to occupy space through valuable contributions worthy of note. This does not mean that those with the power cannot be expected to do something, except I argue that such actions cannot be demanded nor forced on them. If we do not force equality among people of the same race in the face of the status hierarchy in such communities, then we cannot demand equality between races for the same reasons. If we deny one hierarchy and insist on the other, then we fail to apply our moral principles consistently. We must acknowledge differences in abilities and mindsets whether we believe people are naturally endowed or they benefit from their environment.

Having established context for sharing this power to name, I will turn my attention to discussing what can be done to share the power to name things. I shall present my discussion in the form of maxims. The first maxim is “No one will open doors for you if you do not open the door for yourself”. By this maxim,

I mean that the less privileged in this power to name should not waste time and effort to wait for an opportunity to make valuable contributions to the discipline of psychology. They need to use every opportunity available to them to make such contributions. Thus, they should not question their own ability to act when they should. It is understandable as many tend to use failed past attempts by people like themselves to just wish to wait for doors to be opened for them. However, such learned helplessness generates in them inertia that limits their capacity to act (Oppong, 2014). AMWs should understand that no one will hand them a golden spoon just because we seek to embrace social justice globally. They have a responsibility to embrace their own epistemic agency and create their own opportunities to make valuable contributions.

Related to the first is the maxim “Do not be too afraid or humble to speak”. People who wait for other to open the door for them are often afraid or too humble. I am not arguing intellectual humility as a concept. This is because academics need to recognise “that there are gaps in one’s knowledge and that one’s current beliefs might be incorrect.” (Porter et al., 2022, p.1). The humility I speak of is harmful and it is the kind that manifests in a low estimate of one’s importance. People who display such harmful forms of humility are less likely to speak until they are invited to, or they belittle what they have to say before they say them. On the hand, many AMWs are afraid to initiate an academic discourse; they often say to themselves “who are they to want to speak first?” Whether due to fear or harmful forms of humility (as discussed here), many AMWs are unable to or unwilling to speak. On a personal note, I remember asking a colleague to proofread a manuscript for me in 2012; this colleague provided feedback that I wrote like I am an authority on the topic. I also remember being accused of over-self-citation when I was writing on psychology in Ghana, a topic on which many people and I consider myself to be the best authority. This seems to show that many AMWs belittle themselves and show harmful forms of humility even in situations they are the best-known authorities (Oppong, 2013; Yankah, 2012). Thus, the AMWs need to heal themselves of this fear and harmful humility before they can participate in the intellectual space (Oppong, 2019a). This will not be done by anyone; it is an individual healing process and building one’s own capacity or competence.

Another maxim is “Be your own advocate”. Oftentimes, AMWs fail to cite themselves on issues over which they have the ultimate authority. Besides, they fail to teach concepts, theories, or ideas they have developed. They also fail to share during conferences things they have done themselves. It is important to note that no one owes anybody anything to advocate for one’s ideas. If people do, they do it out of the goodness of their heart, but it should not be expected nor demanded. No one exists solely to propagate someone’s ideas. It is important to understand that scholars who lead disciplines have intellectual humility, but they advocate for their own ideas. For instance, Singal (2021) recounted how Martin Seligman sold his positive psychology without substantial evidence to the US Army and got involved in rolling out PTSD-focused positive psychology interventions in the US Army. This implies that anyone who develops an idea or names something in most disciplines should be prepared to stand for themselves

and their idea, to market those ideas, so to speak. No one is obliged to do it for anyone for any reason. Thus, AMWs should be prepared to teach and share their ideas, theories, tools, and methods with others. It is only through disseminating their ideas that they may become mainstreamed. No matter how this argument here simplifies this complex issue, an idea that is not widely shared will never be known well enough to be accepted into the canon of any discipline.

Social influence exists and it can negatively influence a person. This echoes the maxim “Be mindful of social influence”. Thus, people around us can encourage or discourage us in our endeavours. In the case of AMWs wishing to have the power to name, they should be mindful of the people with whom they associate. Although it is not the only explanation, the dynamics at play when one gets exposed to negative social influence is similar to dynamics of Pull-him/her-down (PHD) syndrome. Oppong (2014, p.190) argues that PHD syndrome “is perpetuated by the older generation in order to minimize the tension they may experience if the younger generation succeeds where they could not”. This reflects “both conscious and unconscious attempts by members of a given social or cultural group to discourage and/or prevent its members rising to the top or outperforming them” (Oppong, 2014, p.190). Though I discussed the above quote in the context of intergeneration transmission of inertia, it equally applies when one is talking about peers as well. In other words, comments by people around AMWs can discourage them from trying or to even give up in the face of difficulties. I am not in way saying that this is specific to AMWs, but I argue here that because they lack this power to name, it is more likely going to have greater impact on their capacity to want to name things in the discipline of psychology.

Collaroy to the above maxim is “Do not be afraid of what people would say about you for being a nonconformist”. Societies in the majority of the world tend to have encourage conformity (Mead, 2019). Given the fact the power to name things in the discipline has existed outside the reach of AMWs, many have internalized that as natural and normal. Attempts to not conform to the state of mind of the majority is often seen as offensive or even punished (see Oppong, 2014; Ssentongo, 2020). Once you become a nonconformist, you are also seen as an outcast. However, one can understand this in terms of the dynamics of PHD syndrome as it makes those who may have failed where another has succeeded to appear incapable. On a personal note, I told by fellow Ghanaian academics to do serious research upon completion of my doctoral studies because my line of research did not align with theirs – the less conceptual and heavily empirical studies that do not make any valuable contribution to the discipline beyond providing another imitative data on a given topic (Oppong, 2019a; Yankah, 2012). Some even described me to others as intelligent but controversial and pompous. As an experienced scholar, Lamont (2019, p.34) advises young scholars to “keep in mind that what truly matters is not where you publish but what you publish: the work should be original, daring, stimulating. Otherwise, it is not worth doing... and it is unlikely to interest others. Doing exciting work opens all doors”. Her advice is equally relevant to many AMWs as well. Many of the AMWs have become obsessed with publishing in “designer” or “label”

journals or those indexed in Scopus or Web of Science in a way that is detrimental to making valuable contributions to the discipline. I do not in any way endorse publications in the so-called predatory journals but publishing in decent journals. This obsession is sometime legitimised by their institutional policies on appointment and promotion. No one encourages anyone to publish in predatory journals but when one focuses on making valuable contributions to the field, one will know and publish in places where the academic conversations are taking place.

The last maxim to be discussed is “Seek epistemological allyship from people who genuinely want to help you”. Everyone needs somebody at a point in time. This is true in social settings as it is in academic settings. I define epistemological allyship as the genuine assistance received in support of one’s epistemic agency. In other words, help received from people who want to help you because they see a gem in you. These people can be AMWs or Western academics who want to be your cheerleaders. These people tend to be established leaders in the field themselves and are willing to mentor young academics regardless of their demographic characteristics. When asked to recommend how to nurture African historians of psychology, I suggested that mentorship from established academics is a potential solution; this is because history of psychology is often pursued and taught by many African universities (Oppong, 2019b). This implies that many of the mentors will necessarily be Western academics, the people from whom many AMWs wish to wrestle power. On a personal note, I have benefited immensely from Robert Serpell as my best cheerleader in the discipline of psychology. Others who, unknown to them, also create a conducive environment for me to grow are Heidi Keller and Nandita Chaudhary. I also receive professional support from Paul R. Sachs and William Kwesi Senayah, a Ghanaian academic in the field of textile and garment production. Nandita and William show that support can come from sources from the majority of the world as well. However, these epistemological allies do not just appear on demand. They come to us through our own initial work. For instance, Robert Serpell found me through my critique on early childhood research and practice in Africa (Oppong, 2015). This is consistent with Lamont’s (2019, p.34) advice that doing “original, daring, stimulating...[and] exciting work opens all doors.”

Conclusion

In this paper, I sought to problematise the power to name and located it within a certain sub-population of individual scientists, institution, publication process, language of publication, and internalization of lack of the power to name among psychological scientists of AMWs. I contested that AMWs are complicit in this process of granting to the privileged few the power to name. In other words, one cannot blame the privileged few when the majority willingly accepts, condones, or expects the power to name by the privileged few. In order to share the power to name with the privileged few, I offer six maxims to assist AMWs to heal

themselves to share the intellectual space with the dominant others. These maxims are 1) no one will open doors for you if you do not open the door for yourself, 2) do not be too afraid or humble to speak, 3) be your own advocate, 4) be mindful of social influence, 5) do not be afraid of what people would say about you for being a nonconformist, and 6) seek epistemological allyship from people who genuinely want to help you. The arguments in this paper should be seen to be complementary to those that argue for structural or systemic changes to the higher education and publication ecosystem. I argue that people must be ready when systems have changed to accommodate their views. Thus, I argue that AMWs have a duty to prepare themselves to take advantage of system changes to share the power to name in the discipline of psychology. It should also be understood that the quest for intellectual space to name things in any discipline must not be adversarial and neither must it be approached with a zero-sum mindset. The intellectual space should rather be seen to be infinitely elastic – that it can be stretched or enlarged infinitely to create space for everyone to sit on it. Again, one cannot hope that a foreign army will willingly build your capacity to defeat it in a later battle. Thus, seeking epistemological allyship by AMWs should not be employed to create a sense of fear in those who offer such allyship. Thus, those who genuinely wish to offer a helping hand should not be made to be fearful so as not to want to help. This is because it becomes immoral to wish to replace one tyranny with another instead of enlarging the space for everyone to thrive.

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Subjectivities and Subject Formation

Rethinking power and agency through the lens of intersubjectivity

Peter Busch-Jensen

Abstract

This article is about the phenomenon of power and its relationship to human agency. Power is a complex phenomenon. It can be both harmful and helpful; divisive and unifying; tangible or almost spherically relational. This article grapples with this complexity. Not as a problem to be fixed or simply a point worth repeating, but as a quality that needs to be explored, since it holds valuable contributions to our understanding of human agency and current challenges to it. On a foundational level, power pertains to agency, in the sense that power relates to a capacity for action that is also constitutive of agency. To explore the nature of power is therefore, to some extent, to explore the conditions of human agency. This seems particularly relevant today since our agency is threatened by a number of social crises: rapid climate change, and a diminishing trust in democracy, science, and the rule of law. In this article I relate these problems to insufficiencies in our understanding of the phenomenon of power, not least collective powers we have long relied upon when dealing with agentic challenges. Furthermore, I argue that psychology has a key role to play in this drama. Not because these problems are psychological by nature, but because they relate to a failure of psychology to relate human agency to social and political power in a sufficient way.

Keywords

power, agency, democracy, social critique, dialectics, critical social psychology

Power and its relation to agency

Power is usually related to questions of how people can achieve their goals, and how these goals can sometimes exist in competition, sometimes in concert. However, power is also at play in how we pursue and organize our everyday life and what space this leaves us to make, think, and re-imagine goals. There is, therefore, a chain from beliefs to actions (based on those beliefs), which ties knowledge, agency, and power together—a chain that can be forged in both beneficial and problematic ways, since knowledge is a resource that allows us to interpret our environment and, in the process, provides the scope with which we consider and imagine what actions are possible and advantageous. Power, understood as our ability to handle things and act in the world, therefore relates

to our knowledge in ways that require constant attention. This article focuses on our concepts of the phenomenon of power, their relationship to human agency, and how we understand its development and requirements.

Just 50 meters from where I live is a church, where the doors open twice a month for a climate change grief group. The group is a discussion forum where mostly young people come to share thoughts and feelings of despair, grief, and powerlessness. Contrary to traditional ideas of human problems, the frustrations expressed in this group are not caused by restrictions on what we know but rather result from knowing. Neither do they result from immediate restrictions on the group members' freedoms but rather from a failure to direct it or to exert some collective control over it.

Outside the church, a few are still pondering the potential aftereffects of COVID-19, which in yet another way revealed how expanded human powers are not simply a bridge to empowerment but also produce new vulnerabilities. Of course, COVID-19 is mainly a result of biology, but the pandemic was just as surely a disease of the Anthropocene: a result of man-made mobilities that have made virus containment almost impossible, briefly laying bare, in the process, concealed possibilities in our everyday life for a calmer, less hectic, and decelerated form of life, and limitations in the belief that free markets and competition grant us the power to handle anything.

A similar experience seems to roam in yet another pandemic: this one of mental health. A growing number of people with anxieties—maybe the anxieties of a relational being, who are invited, still more intensely, to celebrate meritocratic notions of self-efficiency, self-making, and “Everything is possible if you work hard” (Sandel, 2021, p. 41)—but nevertheless experience autonomy and self-care to be relational achievements riddled with coincidence and social interdependencies (Pols, 2015; Verkerk, 2007; Leget et al., 2011).

Along with several other challenges—e.g., our trust in science, democracy, and its institutions—these experiences point to urgent questions that do not simply stem from a lack of knowledge or immediate restrictions on our agency. Something less simple is at play. A sense of lack, maybe, not in what we know or do, but in alternative ways of knowing or acting. A feeling, perhaps, that we are expanding human powers in ways that somehow also threaten them. A bit, maybe, like how social media technologies were initially embraced for their democratizing potential, but now seem to threaten these very ideals while at the same becoming almost impossible not to use.

In a way, Karl Marx's now almost 200-year-old Communist Manifesto was one long expression of frustration with this paradox: a tribute, on the one hand, to capitalism and how it made visible the human ability to reshape the world and improve human living conditions; and on the other, a corresponding critique of capitalism's translation of this ability into an impersonal force embedded in a socially alienating society (Marx, 1848)

Power and our social imagination and differences

The disconnect between our unique human capacity to change the world and our limited control over it has, until recently, been framed almost exclusively as a political problem: a side-effect of a capitalist way of life, to which there is no alternative, but to embrace a demand for accumulation, deposit influence on production outside of democratic control, and leave social control to impersonal dynamics of competition. Because of the power of our imagination, we easily buy into shared fictions in our everyday life that portray social phenomena as more solid and natural than they really are. As in the fable of the emperor's new clothes, we tend to seek social confirmation and thus believe in the norms that others believe in. In this way, we reinforce the mental inertia that John Stuart Mill called "the deep slumber of decided opinion" (see Mulgan, 2022, p. 37). Marxists described this as "reification": what are in reality social constructs and relationships take on the appearance of natural facts of the world. The theory of false consciousness builds on this idea: we systematically adopt ideologies that can also ensure our own oppression, for example, by believing in the inevitability of markets or the infallibility of billionaire entrepreneurs. The problem with reification relates to its dimension of abstraction and concerns how forms of human life come to assume an independence from the human beings who have created them in the first place. This is the paradox of how human agency can be transformed into enslavement. The theory of false consciousness - although criticized for its implication that human beings are half-wits - remains all too plausible when it comes to our tendency to underestimate human agency and how much can change by use of collective effort. As a result, we tend to underestimate how we, as individuals, may in fact contribute to social transformation. This is one way ideas, for example about what we call power, can restrict us. As Foucault has elegantly explained, power also operates as an action upon our action, for example by how the way we interpret things effects the possibilities we are able to imagine.

Theoretical context

This article is not a typical study of power. It does not focus on specific forms of domination in society or ways in which some get power at the expense of others. Rather, the aim is to examine how our understanding of power impacts our sense of agency and engagement in the world. Therefore, the article is not solely a psychological study either, although I hope it can also shed some light on a question that perplex many students at my University, regarding the nature of critical psychology and how its mundane concepts relate to social critique and the study of social power (for more on Danish-German Critical Psychology, see Dreier, 2008; Holzkamp, 2013; Højholt & Schraube, 2015; Nissen, 2012; Motzkau & Schraube, 2014; Teo, 1999). This article aims to demonstrate how the study of power cannot be understood as only a domain for political science or

sociology. It also firmly belongs to psychology, just as psychological knowledge is indispensable for the study of power.

My starting point is a basic definition of power as a capacity for action, and of *social power* as about human possibilities and capacities for action. From this, I aim to present some further distinctions to examine a simple question: Can the problems discussed in the introduction be linked to an insufficient conception of the phenomenon of power?

At its core, power is related to agency, in that it represents a capacity for action that is also constitutive of agency. However, given the diverse cultural, social, and political characteristics of human agency, power can manifest in different ways and take on various forms, even to the extent that social power does not have a singular normative or ontological quality. To discuss this complexity, I differentiate between power as *power-to*; *power-over*, and *power-with*. The first two concepts are probably familiar terms (Boonstra, 2016; Wartenberg, 1990; Haugaard, 2013, 2015, 2018; Nesbit & Wilson, 2003; Pratto, 2016), while the latter term, *power-with*, is maybe less so and one I will explore further in the article. All three concepts highlight important aspect of social reality. However, as I hope to show, no analysis of just one of them, provides a comprehensive understanding of power in social life.

Numerous authors have delved into the phenomenon of power and its various aspects such as politics, law, knowledge, organization, and everyday life. My argumentation draws on several of them. That said, much critical research about power discusses power mainly in terms of its operational qualities and consequences. An explanatory analysis of what power refer to, is much more rarely undertaken. Neither is an explanatory analysis of the mechanisms by which social power not only relates to domination, but also to creation and empowerment, that might challenge domination. As a result, many students struggle to get a tangible sense of what to look for, when trying to analyze power. Although some statements might be familiar, such as late-modern bullet points about power being diffuse rather than concentrated, enacted rather than possessed, productive rather than purely coercive, and constitutive of agency instead of merely being deployed by human agents, their significance is sometimes difficult to fully understand. In this article, I therefore also aim to clarify the meaning behind these statements and their importance beyond academic pursuits. Along the way, I introduce terminology that draws from Foucault's ideas but also aims to challenge them by relating power more closely to human agency and our capacities for social action and participation. This brings the discussion closer to what I would call a dialectical approach to power. Of course, the term “dialectical” is not very helpful either, as it has worked its way through twenty-five centuries of interpretations that range from logical argumentation to philosophical and political concepts of evolution applied to fields of thought, nature, and history. Here, I simply use the term to signal that I am exploring power in a manner inspired by the Hegel-Marx tradition of dialectical thought (drawing also on Cultural-Historical Psychology, Activity Theory, and German/Danish Critical Psychology).

In dialectical thought transformation can mean many things, including the interpenetration of opposites, or even ‘the negation of negation’. However, at its core, dialectics is a way of thinking that grasps tensions and contradictions, not as something to wish away, but as a core quality of all identity and change. To think dialectically about social reality and power requires understanding things as not just what can be immediately observed, but also as potentiality: a manifestation of the past, made real by the present, that is also a seed and a precursor to the future. Thus, a dialectical study starts from the notion that the conflation of social reality with what is immediately observable is an abstraction, that needs to be challenged.

The article is structured in three parts. The first part elaborates on the broader relevance of the topic and demonstrates how the need for critical thinking about power goes beyond science. I aim to show how our understanding of power also defines our understanding of scientific rationality, which in turn affects our ability to handle social problems through democratic, agentic means. The second part highlights that our concepts of power are often vague, leading to fragmented critical thinking. This section consists of two parts. The first focuses on traditional views of power and critiques their inadequacy. It argues against three common misconceptions and structures the argument around each one. The second part investigates the complexity of the concept of power on a theoretical level. It explains why it is difficult to define power once and for all and discusses why power cannot be attributed any clear normative provision, but take different forms that must be distinguished and connected to each other. The third part discusses the methodological and theoretical consequences of the previous explorations and how they spill into broader questions of human agency, social life, and democracy, hopefully in a way that also provides some helpful ideas about how we might understand and address current political challenges.

Rationality as an example of how social power never transcends inter-subjectivity

A key idea within democracy is that, ideally, when people meet in public discourse, matters of social privileges and status are suspended so that a discussion among equals can take place. The notion of ‘equals’ simply refers to an idea of ‘membership in a universal humanity’: a universal human ability to contribute iniquely to the commons based on a universal capacity for rationality, inscribed in the event of political participation and further refined in the practices of science. Since the reference to rationality ideally removes the importance of social particulars (the participant’s title, gender, surname, status, station, wealth, or position etc.) from the social equation of legitimacy and membership, the notion of rationality has historically paved the way for a novel universalism and ongoing processes of social inclusion.

In democratic societies, social life is defined by inter-subjectivity, that is, by a certain level of reciprocity, which obligates us to treat and understand other people not as objects, but as subjects. The notion of citizenship, in fact, requires

this; it requires that all members are seen as possessors of agentic powers—the authority to author their own life—and therefore as ends in themselves. Our belief in this authority was originally thought to spring from logic and have a transcendental moral foundation (as suggested by Kant). However, it should rather be understood as an achievement of democratic social struggles and practices (Honneth, 1995).

Therefore, we are looking at a particular cultural formation, which, as such, maps out not only specific possibilities but also its own potentials for exclusion and self-destruction. Potentials for self-destruction, because the functioning of and access to this authority are never more ‘universal’ than our collective support for its norms and institutions allows them to be. Potentials for exclusion, because what is accepted as a legitimate form of participation and contribution still derives its legitimacy from a particular social distinction. No longer between, on the one hand, people’s social station, position, ethnicity, and gender, and on the other, their right to participate in public discourse, but now between the degrees of conformity to the paradigm of reason we inscribe in the event of being recognized as a legitimate member of rationality. Rationality, including scientific rationality, refers not only to individual capacities but also to collective capacities. The agentic powers that rationality makes possible are therefore about more than just freedoms from social norms and rules; they also require freedoms *provided* by such norms and rules, upheld by people abiding by them. This trivial observation invites two questions regarding our current crisis of rationality.

First, since what we understand by ‘rationality’ turns out to matter quite a bit for who we recognize as a legitimate participant in society, we need to ask how we define rationality and if our definitions are in fact as inclusive as we imagine. Secondly, since rationality is not simply granted by logic but also results from social life, we need to ask what forms of social life our notions of rationality and science are preconditioned by. Do they refer to a use of specific methodologies, procedures, and principles that are oriented towards objectivity and truth, or do they rather spring from messy social processes that generate collective support and engagement by means of reflexivity, transparency, and involvement in honest disclosure of interests and the contextual dimensions of knowledge?

Currently, the preferred public and political answer to this question seems to be the former: ‘specific methodologies and procedures oriented towards truth and objectivity.’ Politically, we see a systematic de-prioritization and underfunding of the humanities, while public discourse is permeated by an increasingly unambiguous fascination with STEM-based knowledge as the answer to all present and future challenges. Mark Zuckerberg demonstrated how intoxicated public opinion has become with this narrative when a few years ago, he was admired for explaining to the world how he would use machine learning to create “the clearest model of everything there is to know about the world” (quoted from Madsbjerg, 2017, p. 9). Faced with a new public sphere of social media (SoMe), which seems to threaten to destroy intellectual debate altogether, it is not difficult to understand why many consider it a bad idea to challenge or even debate public ideals of objectivity, truth, and rationality. Predictably, we

have therefore seen a revival of arguments for science that builds on what Hamilton (2013) terms the 'information deficit' model of classical science: the argument that 'people act irrationally because their knowledge is deficient' (Hamilton, 2013). However, as Hamilton continues to explain, this argument is inherently polarizing and therefore rather part of the problem than the solution. More importantly, it also ignores how 'facts have proven to be no match against deeply held values, the values embedded in personal identity' (as recognized also by more traditional psychologists, see e.g., Haidt, 2012; Kahneman, 2011). In other words, if we fail to understand rationality as something that isn't simply a question of methods and logic, but also of social practices, institutions, and forms of life, we might lose what we call rationality.

Donald Trump's refusal to accept the truth of his loss of the presidency in the 2020 US election might invite us to relate current threats to democracy to an eroding ability to distinguish what is true from what is false and respond to this threat by throwing more facts and truths on the table. What is missing from this reaction, however, is the recognition that Trump not only exemplifies how speaking power to truth can be just as efficient, which doesn't mean, of course, that science should therefore do the same. What it does mean, however, is that science does not start with 'knowing' or 'truth'. It starts with people finding knowing and truth relevant. That is, it starts and ends with a shared commitment to question what we know and seek its qualification. Throwing more 'facts' at this problem is therefore not very helpful since it is not about facts, but about commitment and our social life in common. The failure to understand this adds up to a failure to understand adequately the 'rationality' within modern society and our crisis of science and democracy.

The disassociation of the general from the particular

Perhaps in an attempt to counter a growing anti-scientific sentiment, many journalists, politicians, and even scientists insist on a rationality untouched by particulars and inter-subjective hermeneutics. 'These are the facts. Period!' As a result, current public debate makes social collaboration and understanding even more difficult while at the same time denying a relationship between this public use of 'reason' and social domination and division. I believe the current crisis of science and democracy is founded on this radical dissociation of the general from the particular, to the effect that, as Terry Eagleton put it: "when this dissociation becomes less plausible, (...) the public sphere will begin to crumble" (Eagleton, 1984, p. 17). If science and democracy are in fact not things we have but inter-subjective processes we share, it makes little sense to conceptualize these institutions as phenomena that transcend the relationships they in fact result from. This is precisely why democracy and science require other criteria of legitimacy than 'truth' and 'objectivity.'

The core of scientific rationality is not the reasonableness of knowledge itself but the reasonableness of social events and action; the reasonableness of 'the other.' It is the recognition of knowledge's relevance for and by 'the other'

that is crucial to the functioning of rationality since, without it, human rationality is quite helpless. As argued by Clegg, “self-regarding behavior in the absence of the recognition of the other and by others is of no value in itself” (Clegg et al., 2014, p. 29). “On these criteria, it is not the alleged ‘disinterestedness’ of a position that makes it worthwhile, but the degree of reflexivity that it exhibits in relation to the conditions of its own existence” (Hardy & Clegg, 1996, p. 701).

As simplified empiricist ideals of knowledge have traversed from the natural sciences into not only the social and human sciences but also into public discourse and politics, an alliance between science and politics has been forged that at first seems to offer a non-partisan alternative to moral and ideological disagreement. But disagreement is not a political problem; it is what constitutes politics. Therefore, to govern a democratic society first and foremost requires contending with disagreement, which again requires a deep understanding of how to disagree and why disagreements arise. The assumption that the source of political disagreement is a lack of information spurs the belief that political problems can be solved by inviting experts to enlighten the masses. But this belief is not oriented towards democracy. Rather, it leads towards a technocracy, where an elite of ‘experts’ (the well-educated and successful) eventually govern the rest.

We need to consider the possibility that current dysfunctions in our commitment to social conversation, science, and democracy are not caused by a lack of ‘rationality’ but rather by serious deficiencies in our conceptions of ‘rationality.’ Modernity relies on rationality as the main means for making democracy work. However, as discussed by Taylor (1971) and Flyvbjerg (1998): if we fail to understand that the interrelations between rationality and power are not as clear-cut as we tend to imagine, we end up with a notion of rationality that leaves democracy ignorant of how rationality and power work together, and therefore “open to being dominated by power, rather than rationality” (Flyvbjerg, 1998, p. 231). Given the challenges of our time – environmental, social, cultural, political – this is a problem we need to confront. A first step is to understand how power relates to human rationality and agency. When we examine this, we see that we cannot rely on a notion of rationality that abstracts away from the particulars of social problems, just as we cannot rely on a notion of competition as the primary source of human power or a notion of democracy that focuses mainly on representational democracy.

The concept of power

Power and its relationship to agency is a complicated matter. Our concepts of power are disputed, and not only in a grammatical sense of an unclear use of the term. There is not much agreement either on whether power is a positive (Arendt, 1970) or a negative (Althusser, 1971) phenomenon; on whether questions of power are best addressed empirically (Dahl, 1969; Latour, 2005, 2010) or theoretically (Marx, 1848; Foucault, 1984; Boltanski & Chiapello, 2005); and on whether power is a form of violence (Marx, 1848; Bourdieu, 1984) or if violence

is rather an expression of powerlessness (Follett, 1940; Arendt, 1970; Foucault, 1980).

While many critical approaches generally agree on rejecting the in-built atomism, individualism, and universalism of positivist and behaviorist methodology and conceptions of power, and while they also tend to agree on more hermeneutic and/or constructivist understandings of human relationships, consensus quickly fragments into heterogeneity as soon as the discussion moves on to questions of how to study power and, by extension, what ‘being critical’ entails (Ibáñez, 1997). Thus, instead of encountering a strong tradition of critical social psychologies, students find themselves on a stormy sea of disputes about realism versus relativism, humanist ideals versus post-human epistemologies, the ontological status of cultural symbols versus the material world, and the purpose and value of science itself.

As Spears phrases it, “This heterogeneity in itself is a refreshing sign in life to be contrasted with much of the mainstream, where meta-theoretical debates about method, theory, epistemology and ontology have long since been forgotten or repressed” (Spears, 1997, p. 1). I agree. However, if our agreement to disagree translates into fragmentation, it might pose a problem. It is in this context that we need to revisit our concepts of power. Not to provide a consensus about how to define power, but to better understand the problems of defining it. To do so, I argue below for an approach to power that invites us to think of power as grounded, on a foundational level, in reciprocal entanglements of highly different qualities. The term ‘foundation’ points to a ‘solid base of a structure’, usually situated below the ground. It is an unseen structure that helps support the weight of something—a building—or, in this case, a particular theoretical fabric into which other pieces can then be sewn. Foundations are typically unnoticed in everyday functioning since they are regarded as so basic that the way they anchor things also makes them hard to see (Clegg & Cunha, 2019). It is in this way that I will try to unearth the phenomenon of power as grounded in an unnoticed realm of intersubjective and socio-cultural reciprocity and collaboration. If we do not understand the foundation of human agency and power, we cannot secure its continued support and development.

A few words about my position

A dialectical understanding of power invites us to think of power as relational and to examine the material and social-cultural relationships from which social and agentic power emerge. This is relevant because a common denominator in current social, political, and ecological crises seems to pertain to overlooked contributions to our way of life, not only from the communities, we are part of, but also from nature, history, our shared institutions and far-away people and places.

A dialectical conception of power puts a series of social phenomena into a new light. For example, conflict – often viewed as a dangerous outcome of power struggles – can here be seen also as a means of creating groups and novel

resources for collective capacities for action. In general, a connection is engendered which does not divorce psychology from its worldliness, does not divorce the individual from the social and does not divorce social power from the relations its effects.

To see power as a property of relationships, rather than individual agents, is not new (see e.g. Fiske & Berdahl, 2007; Hogg, 2001; Pratto, 2016). Nor, however, is it uncontested. The social psychologist Felicia Pratto, for example, critiques relational understandings of power because they do not allow a measurement of individual powers unless they have a relationship (Pratto, 2016). The premise for Pratto's and many others critiques of relational understandings of power is that we should also be able to measure power and compare 'who has more' of it without necessarily referring to the relationship among subjects. In short, in order to be properly defined, power needs to have a quality that allows acontextual measurement and singular ownership. Yet in order to relate power to agency, we first need to ask how subjects are constituted in the first place since, if we ignore this question, we actually miss out on where most of the action relating to power takes place (Reicher, 2016). Furthermore, the relevance of studying power does not derive from questions of who has more or less of it. It derives from a need to understand better how to change and better people's lives, opportunities, and social coexistence.

Since there is no social world in which relationality is not crucial to human agency and self-enactment, a scientific approach to power should engage social life, not separate itself from it. Socio-material relations are not 'one factor' amongst many others that impact human agency. Rather, they are the medium in which 'factors' as such emerge. Insisting on a relational approach to human psychology is therefore not simply to place oneself in a certain corner of a theoretical map, but a way of pointing out what is necessary to study, if we want to understand human agency and social power.

Three traditional misconceptions of power

Rather than discuss power in all its forms, I wish to focus on forms of power that, resulting from human activity, belong to the realm of the social. I will begin by connecting the relational nature of social power to three misconceptions in traditional conceptualizations of power and discuss along the way the blind spots they leave us with, which we need to pay more attention to. These critiques are not new. They build on known critiques of empiricist notions of epistemology, subjectivity and science. I repeat them simply to clarify something that, while familiar, easily drifts into a misty fog in which power is not a thing but rather everywhere and nowhere in particular. I hope to clear away some of this fog.

First, power is often conceptualized within a realist empiricist ontology, which views it as either a possession or an effect of individual abilities (the will, wants, talents, interests and intentions of individuals or groups) or human-made constructs (laws, credentials, money etc.). As a result, power (as demonstrated by Pratto) tends to be understood and examined as something that some may or may

not possess in some measurable quantities, and that can be described and measured independently of its context and lived social reality. We observe this line of thinking reflected in everyday notions like “Once alcohol has you in its power, it’s difficult to stop drinking”, or in power-studies that identify the most influential people in society (often inspired by C. Wright Mill, 1956).

A well-described, albeit basic, issue with this conception is that it overlooks how individual abilities and capacities for action are always intertwined with situational dimensions. For instance, people’s possibilities, wants, interests, and intentions are shaped and transformed (in enabling and restrictive ways) by their understanding of the situation and how others perceive it. A non-relational ontology prompts us to interpret people’s actions, wants, and needs as simply reflections of personal traits, needs, or capabilities. This occurs when, for example, problems such as growing obesity are reduced to issues of individual willpower or biology, which can supposedly be understood and addressed independently of wider socio-cultural dynamics.

Second, power *relations* are usually depicted as a dyad between person A and person B, as exemplified by the political scientist Robert A. Dahl’s frequently cited definition of power: “*A has power over B to the extent that he can get B to do something that B would not otherwise do.*” (Dahl 1969, p. 80). Here, power relations are perceived as fundamentally dyadic, with a hierarchical structure between distinct entities - a relationship between one who dominates (a person or group) and one who is dominated. This dyadic model of power, as described by Wartenberg (1990), leads us to conceptualize power as a zero-sum game, thus overlooking the potential for social power relations to be mutually beneficial and plus-sum additive. Moreover, it discourages us from recognizing the dynamic nature of power relations, and how power relations could also have emergent qualities that can lead to significant transformations, as they frequently involve collaboration. To disregard this aspect of power is to overlook not only how adopting the position of a victim can also be a strategic exertion of power, and how individuals who were formerly oppressed may sometimes wield power, but also to overlook how we can effectively work to alter power relations. It’s crucial to remember that domination, hierarchy, and asymmetry are not inherently problematic, as power is not always a zero-sum game. Even instances of social domination may be driven by intentions to empower the non-dominant party, thus potentially resulting in transformative outcomes (Wartenberg, 1990), aimed at dissolving the power imbalance itself. This aspect is pivotal in various relationships, such as those between parents and children, doctors and patients, and teachers and students.

Third, in the quest for acceptance as a legitimate and scientific concept, power is often construed as empirically tangible and observable. Robert Dahl’s attempt to define power serves as a prime example of this approach. His endeavor involved critiquing prior definitions that he deemed unscientific, primarily because they did not align sufficiently with a behaviorist framework. As Dahl contends, “The behaviorist approach is an attempt to improve our understanding of politics by seeking to explain the empirical aspects of political life through methods, theories, and criteria of proof that are acceptable according

to the canons, conventions, and assumptions of modern empirical science” (Dahl, 1961, p. 767). Dahl's renowned definition necessitates that all operational facets of social power be observable (Wartenberg, 1990, pp. 56-57). Consequently, any instance of social power lacking such empirical grounding is either disregarded or dismissed. However, this model overlooks the fact that *keeping* certain actions from occurring (such as resistance, critique, or complaint) can often be an outcome of social power. Hence, the model fails to acknowledge the intricate structural forms that power can assume in everyday life, thereby hindering a clear conceptualization of how power relations actually operate (Foucault, 1980, 1982). According to a strictly empiricist notion of power, the power dynamics within, for instance, academic grading practices are perceived to stem solely from the actions of teachers and students. Consequently, they are also regarded as the parties capable of changing them. However, this perspective overlooks the interconnectedness and alignment of grading practices with various other practices, such as securing employment, forming relationships, attaining social status, or satisfying parental expectations. These ‘alignments’ significantly shape the perceptions of teachers and students and constrain their potential responses. To ignore this, not only fosters unrealistic expectations among students and teachers but also creates an artificial conceptual gap between human interactions and their broader socio-historical context.

Summary discussion

Earlier, I discussed various insufficiencies in our everyday notions of power, many of which stem from a general familiarity with empiricist notions of reality. I point out problems with this framework and argue that it leads us to overlook important dimensions of the worldliness and intersubjectivity of power dynamics. To underscore the main issue at stake in my own terms, we should note what is systematically placed outside our field of vision: namely, that social life exhibits emergent properties that render power relations productive in ways that traditional empiricist ontologies and cause-and-effect logic fail to capture. One of Michel Foucault's many contributions is to highlight this aspect by conceptualizing power not just as a form of action upon actions ("conduire des conduites"), but more precisely as the way in which actions condition the possibilities of other actions (Foucault, 1982, 1984). While empiricist notions of power attempt to safeguard the authority of knowledge by removing it from a hermeneutical circle of intersubjectivity, Foucault's work demonstrates the futility of this ambition by revealing it as itself a hermeneutical maneuver.

The attempt to argue for a domain of knowledge that functions independently of intersubjective processes of interpretation and meaning creates blind spots in empiricist scientific rationality that also affect our political thinking about human agency, social reality, power, and problems. To fulfill its requirements, the empiricist tradition reconstructs social reality as consisting solely of brute data. The idea of an intersubjective reality that might contradict this data-reality is wholly opaque to this epistemology (as explained in more

detail by Taylor (1971). Therefore, very little room is left to consider the possibility, for example, that “the power men have over women might not simply be constituted by the actions of particular men, women, or institutions, but that power could also manifest in a greater difficulty for a woman in making her fellow workers stand up for her in a conflict, or in differences in the ways we spontaneously interpret the likelihood of success for some people (women, ethnic minorities, people of color, or specific sexual orientations) in comparison to how we interpret it for others” (Wartenberg, 1990, p. 150).

Human activity weaves activities together into clusters of social practices that, through different forms of alignment and coordination, produce wider structural dimensions in social life (Wartenberg, 1990). In fact, this is one way we can understand power as productive, but also why power relations can sometimes seem difficult to change. Precisely because social alignments are ‘productive’ and provide opportunities and stability in social life, they also offer the benefits and rationale through which they are sometimes defended and reproduced. As when defenders of slavery in America argued how ending slavery would have a devastating economic impact, since reliance on slave labor was the foundation of the economy. Power also relates to human preferences. However, human preferences are complicated because they are adaptive; they respond to social circumstances. If society puts certain things out of reach for some people, they typically learn not to desire those things. This observation, made famous by Jon Elster in his book *Sour Grapes* (Elster, 1983), points to a significant difficulty in critical power studies: processes like exploitation and marginalization can be internalized to such an extent that they are perceived as natural and defensible. A worker brought up on images that equate ‘being skilled’ with someone who heroically suffers and does what he is told might not necessarily develop an appetite for workplace democracy, just as a woman, raised to find ‘proper’ femininity incompatible with work outside the home, might never develop an appetite for formal education. Since power relations have emergent properties that also make them productive, we tend to sometimes defend them even when we should perhaps try to change them.

Getting to active human agency

The fact that power relations take numerous forms illuminates a multitude of social engagements and reasons that motivate people to engage in them. For example, a student might participate in grading practices for educational, vocational, romantic, or social reasons, which pertain to relations that can simultaneously be exploitative, empowering, positional, or affiliative (See Pratto, 2016), as well as oriented towards both general and specific ‘orientational guidelines’ (See Marvakis, 2024). They are general because, as just mentioned, in the process of social development, more generalized action-environments also emerge from social coordination and alignment, which then serve as guides for individual orientation. This may take the form of career counseling, as well as institutions in a more common sense, or generalized discourses about expected

preferences and choices in life. They are specific because the variety and complexity of social alignments and connectivity necessitate subjective orientation and evaluation. Questions such as 'But what forms of social participation are relevant to *me*?' and 'Do grades actually matter to *me* and people important to *me*?'.

Since we participate in power relations not only for general but also for personal reasons, we cannot fully understand or study social power if we simply take the individual subject and its preferences and goals for granted, or reduce them to mere reflections of structural forces. Rather, we need to examine how such goals and preferences come about, how they might vary, conflict, and change, since human agency does not simply exist but emerges precisely from a parallel formation and co-production of the societal and the subjective. Therefore, the way and extent to which these dimensions overlap, collide, create friction, and change actually constitute the core of the productive relationship of social power relations. Studying social power without including a situated interest in people's first-person perspectives, and their social engagements and activities, is therefore just as problematic as providing a decontextualized report of people's preferences.

A dialectical concept of power

One word for different phenomena

Bertrand Russell once wrote that "the fundamental concept in social science is Power, in the same sense in which Energy is the fundamental concept in physics" (Russell, 1938, p. 10). In other words, Russell describes what we might term *force* or *energy* as power's primordial form, since power, at its most general level, describes a capacity for making something happen, which, in a sense, is fundamental to any sense of agency, human or non-human. When an agent of any sort makes a difference in the world, this agent manifests *power*, as in: a *power to* do something, to be a causal agent. This *power-to* definition precedes *power-over* relations, and refers to the simple fact that anything can be a force in the world if it brings something new—a change—into existence. This meaning is also reflected in our everyday language when we, for example, talk about 'solar power' or 'power cables' or 'the power of positive thinking'. Yet a different definition of power has become dominant within the social sciences and the humanities, namely an understanding of power as *power-over*; as a relational aspect of social life that poses questions of social justice and equality, and points to problems of polarization, exploitation, and marginalization. In lexical descriptions we therefore encounter at least two overarching definitions of power: one describes power as 'power-to', the other describes power as 'power-over' (Pansardi, 2012, Wartenberg, 1990; Haugaard, 2015).

At first glance, the difference between these definitions seems mainly one of hierarchy since power-over can be understood as a subset of power-to: some people's power-to do things is exercised by getting others to do them for them.

Nevertheless, the difference is greater, since it also marks a qualitative shift. In the first definition, we are talking about a potential for 'power' and 'action,' which makes us think of power as a resource, an ability, skill, or a kind of capital a person might have. In the second sense, however, we are talking about a relationship; a realization of power as constituting a relational effect. This duality, if not addressed, can result in unnecessary disagreements. As Wartenberg phrases it: "By acknowledging the fact that theories of power-to and power-over conceptualize different, though related, aspects of society, we see that these theories do not necessarily compete, as they would if power were an *essentially* contested concept." (Wartenberg, 1990, p. 31).

To take a recent example: When the first reports of local cases of COVID-19 (accompanied by images of scary scenes from Spanish hospitals) began emerging in the Danish media in 2020, the Danish public quickly and frantically began clamoring for scientific knowledge and political action. New regulations governing social behavior were announced, and in short order, public support for them mobilized on an unprecedented scale. First came face masks and social distancing, then closed theaters, restaurants, and bars, and later, of course, vaccinations. In close collaboration with doctors, public health officials, and other experts, the Danish government worked hard to establish a culture of social behaviors and expectations, which soon created an environment of intense self-disciplinary action and social monitoring. In no time, expectations of regular testing, self-quarantine, and support for full-scale vaccination programs became the norm.

These events, on the one hand, demonstrate a development of power-to: society as a whole handled a serious social problem through a collective ability to adapt and respond, which in itself is a positive thing. On the other hand, the development of this resource at the same time fits like a hand in glove with what can be described as a late-modern form of governmentality. It demonstrates an expansion of power-over: an increased political domination achieved through the disciplinary techniques of a well-oiled assemblage of knowledge-power strategies. In effect, the pandemic in Denmark constitutes a dual process: it developed a collective power-to (in the sense of 'being able to') handle a serious problem, while simultaneously expanding the political sphere's power-over and domination. We cannot determine, once and for all, how power is at play in these developments, since both interpretations are somehow valid. Therefore, the difference between them easily translates into a disagreement about how to understand our shared reality, even though the differing interpretations actually refer to an indeterminacy in the subject matter—namely, that the word power does not point to just one thing, but to a phenomenon that folds two dimensions of social life together. As 'substance,' power is a capacity to do, and as such, relates to questions of resources (skills, abilities, capital, etc.) and empowerment. As process, power is a relation and as such refers to questions of how we distribute and organize resources in our life-in-common; to questions of social dominance and justice, and empowerment for whom. We can ignore this duality and choose to focus solely on people's development of a collective capacity for action, and be puzzled by how something we think we should celebrate (the

empowerment of people through collective effort) can pose a problem for some critics. Likewise, we might focus solely on power-over relations and be puzzled by how people consciously and willingly participate in their own exploitation and domination.

But power is both of these dimensions. We develop resources and capacities for action, by applying them in *social* practices, that are organized around and thus contribute to develop and reproduce both: collective capacities as well as *power-over* relations: processes of social collaboration, selection, hierarchy, and inequality (Bourdieu, 1984; Honneth, 1995; Sandel, 2022). Therefore, no analysis of just one of these dimensions provide us with a comprehensive understanding of how power is at play in social life. Instead, the duality of power brings attention to social power as constituted in reciprocal dialectical relations between the individual and the societal.

In *The Forms of Power*, Thomas Wartenberg (1990) unfolds the history of the Western European concept of power. I wish to draw attention to a particular aspect of his account: the historical shift from a dialectical understanding of power to a dualistic understanding of power as measurable force embedded in cause-and-effect relations.

Plato defined power in the following way: "I suggest that anything has real being, that is so constituted as to possess any sort of power (*dynamis*) either to effect anything else or to be effected" (Plato, 1961, p. 992, in Wartenberg, 1990, p. 20). This definition, like Russell's, describes power as an ability to become a causal agent by enabling something to come into existence. However, Plato relates this 'power' to two separate but inseparable dimensions: one of qualities, which could allow something to happen, and one of reciprocal relations between such qualities, that allow them manifest. Since power is both a power to 'effect' or 'be effected', and one cannot manifest without the other, power takes the form both of *potentials* "either to effect anything else or to be effected" and of realization. Plato insisted on this duality, since any *manifestation* of power requires an encounter *between* capacities. Therefore, power is always *interactional* and capacities merely *potentials* until activated in some interactional form. To affect the world, we must engage the world just as it must engage with us. Otherwise, no effect, can be recorded. On the other hand, no change or effect is possible either, without its necessary potentials. The term *power* is therefore both a word for separate *potentials* (for agency) and a word for *realization* of relationships (between agency). The essence of power is thus described as double-sided: Power is a dialectical relationship between separate capacities and reciprocal relationships, with both cause and affect each other. As such, power, does not have a singular form, but constitutes a dialectical formation with emergent properties. Furthermore - and this is important - no agentic power is stronger than what is afforded by the foundational realm of relationships, that constitutes its actualization.

With the advent and success of a modern science, and its celebrated triumphs of physics and mathematics, the messy business of dialectic ontology

has long gone been re-arranged in more “appropriate” mechanistic terms¹. Also, the idea that power is a reciprocal phenomenon might seem counterintuitive. If someone hits me or a strong wind blows me over, it is difficult to see the reciprocity: exactly what ‘capacities for agency’ am I contributing to this situation?

Obviously, social life also confronts subject-object relations of power. Hannah Arendt’s distinction between power and violence confront this observation. Political power, she argues, relates to relations among *subjects*. Violence and coercion are therefore not power but refer to a lack thereof; precisely because brute force and coercion abolish the social world of intersubjectivity. According to Arendt, the frustrated father who forces his protesting child into the car seat operates in the same way as the wind. He acts not with power, but out of *powerlessness*, and therefore, for a moment, dissolves their shared social world by placing his child in a world of objects with no room for agency.

In democratic societies social life is defined by inter-subjectivity, that is: by a certain level of reciprocity, which obligates us to understand and treat other people not as objects, but as subjects. The notion of citizenship rests on this point; no citizen is seen as an object, but as the author of their own life, an end in themselves. We can discuss if this authority, as suggested by Kant, constitute the foundation of all moral systems. We don’t need to discuss if its social manifestation is primarily an achievement of collective social struggles and intersubjective practices and relationships (Honneth, 1995). Certainly, brute force, violence and coercion still exist, but not as useful forms of *social* power. Simply because the potential for being a human *subject*, cannot manifest in subject-object relations (As also explained by Hegel, 1969).²

¹ This development can be observed for example in the movement from Hobbes’s interpretation of power as “[a person’s] present means to obtain some future apparent Good” (Hobbes, 1985 [1641]: 150), to Bertrand Russell’s definition of power as “the ability to produce intended effects” (Russell, 1938: 35). Due to a preoccupation with autonomy, formulated not least by liberalist thinkers, we see a shift in focus from a focus on reciprocity to a focus on singular causal agency. John Locke (1632-1704), for example, spoke of power in somewhat similar terms as Plato, when, in *Essay Concerning Human Understanding*, he maintained that power was an ability both to influence the world and to be influenced (Locke, 1959: vol 2, Cp 7). However, Locke described the relational dimensions of power as a meeting between an *active* and a *passive* form, and thereby paved the way for a shift towards a cause-and-effect approach to power. As soon as attention is focused on the active part - and little attention is provided to the ‘passive’ - the road is not long to defining power as something that relates to an ability of individual agents to obtain *specific* goals and benefits for themselves by constraining the choices available to others. Hence, the split from here on between power as a capacity ‘to make something happen’, and power as a certain way of obtaining this power through social domination and exploitation.

² One might say that what distinguishes human agency from other forms of agency, is that even when it is annulled, it still acts as a *potential* for resistance, thus requiring constant attention and a dedication of resources by the dominant party (for control, domination etc.). Agency thus in itself holds a potential for social development towards forms of domination, that are not based on threats or coercion, but on authority and collaboration.

Power as productive - the emergent properties of human agency

A dialectical conceptualization of social power brings attention to the fact, that power is productive because human activities have emergent properties. These properties do not refer to something emerging from thin air, but rather to an ability of relational compositions to bring about qualitatively new things that demonstrate hidden possibilities via novel relations (Hegel, 1969). We can think of new metals, but some better examples include language, friendship, money, or nations. Just as there is no such thing as a 'private language' (Wittgenstein, 1953), a friendship or a nation cannot be said to belong to any one individual or individual contribution, even though it cannot either exist without individuals. Consequently, emergent properties are not tangible objects we can simply point to, akin to physical objects. Nevertheless, they indisputably exist and function both as causes and effects of human activity, as they are both results of human action and provide reasons for it. Consider a simple activity like playing tennis: one player serves, and the receiving player deflects the server's shot with a return. This new shot, in turn, is negated by the first player's attempt to deflect the return shot with an additional shot, and so forth (Engelsted, 2019, p. 40).

While the tennis duel showcases the players' individual abilities, it simultaneously demonstrates how these abilities only manifest through an intersubjective interaction, resulting in something we cannot simply reduce to its parts. The impact of the first shot persists in the second, and continues into the third, which is again present in the fourth, and so forth. In fact, all the shots remain relevant throughout the rally, which then evolves into a set, the set into a match, and the match into an event. None of these stages can be attributed to any particular agent; rather, they all belong to a broader foundational intersubjective realm of reciprocity from which new realities and opportunities emerge: a social world that eventually encompasses new places (tennis clubs), professions (coaches, professionals), industries, and events (Wimbledon, etc.).

As a metaphor, the tennis example allows for a number of interesting observations. First, it portrays human agency and its results as something that invites a more shared sense of ownership. Second, it points to an understanding of social power as potentially also a constructive means of collectively controlling the social-material relationships that constitute social life and activity. Third, it invites an understanding of human rationality as an engagement in reciprocity between causes and effects, rather than as an engagement in their separation. Fourth, it depicts differences and frictions not simply as problems to be overcome, but also as potentials for new opportunities. And lastly, it hints at a conception of social reality that affirms collective human agency and activity as its conscious, creative principle.

With these observations, we return to the initial questions of this article regarding our inability to tackle looming social problems of climate change, anti-science sentiments, and weakened trust in democracy and its institutions. The question posed was whether these challenges might relate to our concepts of power, here expanded upon as a problem of unrecognized contributions to the

powers we celebrate, potentially resulting in a failure to secure, defend, and develop them.

Democratic power and agency

When discussing community and shared social life, we often imagine a consensus of beliefs and values that belongs to its members. However, intersubjective meanings and powers can never be a property of individuals, as they are rooted in social practice - belonging inherently to communal interaction. This is why social reality cannot be simplified to its immediate manifestations: its institutions, laws, technologies, or even conflicts and disputes. Rather, the strength of these manifestations converges with the strength of their foundation of intersubjective meaning, without which even the most bitter lack of consensus could not exist.

This observation suggests that the agentic powers and opportunities we celebrate are built upon a foundation that remains largely unseen. One reason for this is that, as argued by Taylor, "Common meanings, as well as intersubjective ones, fall through the net of mainstream social science" (Taylor, 1971, p. 31). To delve deeper into this issue, we must address another misconception regarding power—this time in our understanding of political power.

Political power as competition or as collaboration

The modern state has evolved from governance based primarily on brute force to forms of governance that rely less on coercion and more on so-called soft powers associated with authority. While brute force remains a foundational premise of democratic state governance (defined by a monopoly on the legitimate use of force), its transition to 'soft powers' raises questions about authority and legitimacy—terms that define our understanding of the state's right to our allegiance. In essence, democracy hinges on collective support for its authoritative institutions. However, whether discussing power as force or authority, political power in Western liberal societies is almost exclusively viewed as adversarial. Our political systems are structured around the principles of representative democracy, where power - whether in the form of force or authority - is seen as inherently risky and is restrained through mechanisms such as 'checks and balances' (e.g., the separation of powers into legislative, executive, and judicial branches, as envisioned by Montesquieu). Consequently, like many of our other institutions, politics is framed within the context of civilized competition, deemed the optimal approach for societal progress and efficiency. This conceptualization of power, while undeniably valuable, inherently views power and politics as a zero-sum game, perpetuating an imagery of winners and losers, warfare, and struggle. Fully embracing this depiction of power and, by extension, politics, poses significant challenges.

Obviously, social power sometimes approximates a battle zone divided by fair competition at best, domination at worst. However, as noted by Lakoff and Johnson: “when we are preoccupied with the battle aspects, we often lose sight of the cooperative aspects” (Lakoff & Johnson 1980, p. 10). As many feminist theorists argue (Allan, 1998, 2008; Arendt, 1958, 1970; Bachrach & Baratz, 1962; Benhabib et al., 1995; Brown, 1988; Crenshaw, 1991), and as much community psychology demonstrates (Fisher et al., 2007; hooks, 1994; Hope et al., 2018; Kloos et al., 2012; Rappoport, 1987; Macías-Gómez-Estern, 2021; Serrano-Garcia, 1984, Thai & Lian, 2019), there is more to be said about power (see also notably Foucault, 1980, 1984, 1997; Lukes, 1994; Clegg, 1989; Nesbit & Wilson, 2003; Haugaard, 2015, 2018; Wartenberg, 1990).

Issues of dominance, control, competition, and inequality are central aspects of power, but they do not encompass its entirety. While individuals or groups may expand their capacity for action by exerting power over others, it is also possible—and indeed a common occurrence in everyday life—for individuals to enhance their capabilities by cooperating and seeking mutual empowerment *with* others, rather than just separate power. This process typically involves an ongoing, sometimes subtly evolving integration of perspectives and differences, resulting in new and more mutually informed modes of action. Through this, what was once perceived as the needs or perspectives of others may become intertwined with one's own, as individuals gain deeper insights into collaborative interdependencies. Thus, power is not solely about conflict, domination, or opposition; it also emerges from social collaboration and collective action.

Power-to, power-over, and power-with

When viewed through the lens of power, the agentic dimensions are emphasized, as power-to can be described as a 'capacity for action constitutive of agency' (Haugaard, 2018, p. 113). However, as this agentic power-to is rooted in reciprocal relations, it's important to recognize that human agency cannot be simply understood as the development of individual abilities or resources optimized for success within a hierarchical system of winners and losers. While this definition of agency may align well with a society that prioritizes competition, much of our agentic power-to—our ability to act and participate in social life—results from collaborative efforts and is thus also acquired through the imposition of restraints, limits, commitments, and restrictions on our agency. In everyday life, we are bound by numerous concerted human powers. I get annoyed if I am pulled over by a police officer, and when my son tested positive with COVID 19, I self-quarantined and then complained about it constantly.

Also, I might find it quite appealing if, by some strange cosmic event, I didn't have to pay any taxes. However, while various factors like this may seem to constrain my ability to act freely, I also recognize that they ultimately contribute to enhancing it. Therefore, I don't adhere to these constraints simply out of obligation or fear of consequences; I comply because I genuinely desire to

do so. Just as I appreciate the benefits of police officers fulfilling their duties and individuals fulfilling their tax obligations, I willingly adhere to societal norms and regulations. It is for the same reason that a political party should gracefully concede defeat in a democratic election—not out of fear of retribution, but out of respect and appreciation for the social institution that simultaneously empowers them by offering the opportunity to participate again and maybe win the election next time around.

As argued by Haugaard (2013): at the level of human practice, social rules, norms, and restraint are not necessarily opposed to individual powers and agency because their constraining qualities are at the same time enabling. The power at play here results from *concerted* powers, a socially developed form of *power-with*, that is neither simply zero sum, nor simply rooted in competition, since it does not belong to any particular participant but rather endows everyone with the capacity for future action. In *this* form, social power isn't simply a means to an end, but a goal in itself. Because constraints enable *generalized* capacities, this kind of power can be seen to provide a democratic form of agentic 'powers-to, that does not necessarily contribute to social power-over. Instead, it reflects and supports a shared intersubjective realm of meaning and power. We can name this power: *power-with*³

Power-with and the development of the common good

Social power is a product of a unique human capacity for cooperation. Cooperation can be defined as an exchange in which the participants benefit from the encounter, and through which one can accomplish something that one cannot accomplish alone. Of course, collaboration exists on a spectrum. It can be combined with competition (as in electoral politics or when children collaborate on rules for fair play), or it can take the form of a goal in itself, as in friendship or romance. Cooperation stretches from collusion (which might be destructive to others) to mutual pleasure (which potentially has no negative consequences for anyone). The main task of social co-existence, however, is to respond to others on their own terms, and here cooperation can help individuals and groups grasp the consequences of their own actions. Which is to say, that we can gain both insight and new capacities from collaboration, not least demanding forms of collaboration: new insights into ourselves, others and our shared social world, along with new possibilities for action that match these insights.

Since social cooperation and intersubjectivity are rooted in differences, it entails a risk of social conflict and warfare. The development of *power-with*

³ Attention to this aspect of power is often associated with Hannah Arendt's work and, in extension, Jurgen Habermas's *Theorie des kommunikativen Handelns* (1987). It was also elaborated on earlier, by, for one, the organizational theorist, Mary Parker Follett (1868-1933), who coined the term *power-with*, to draw attention to an additional dimension of power. "So far as my observation has gone, it seems to me that whereas power usually means power-over, the power of some person or group over some other person or group, it is possible to develop the conception of power-with" (Follett, 1940: 78-79). "Power is not a pre-existing thing which can be handed out to someone or wrenched from someone. The division of power is not the thing to be considered, but that method of organization which will generate power" (Follett, 1995: 113).

therefore raises difficult questions about how to handle competing interests, needs, perspectives and knowledge. In formal collaborations, this conflictive dimension of social life is often given a specific *political* form of 'representation,' where differences between social parties are negotiated in a strategic fashion without necessarily exchanging or altering people's perspectives and positions. This strategic presentation and negotiation of differences within representational systems can sometimes make it difficult for participants to actually come to learn about and understand each other's interests and concerns, leading the participants to understand the collaboration as a collaboration between opponents rather than partners. The tendency of each party to keep their real interests and insight hidden, in pursuit of an advantage in negotiations, is one reason why representative democracy is maybe sufficient for the development of democratic institutions and powers, but may still turn out insufficient to sustain their foundation of inter-subjective support and meaning.

Democratic power-with pertains to transformative processes of both individual and social development and self-transcendence. It involves developing shared perspectives of cross-contextual insight that invite participants to reconceptualize problems. Such insights are poorly, if at all, nurtured by strategic orientations, and for this reason, they are a rare sight in today's political life. Nevertheless, they are not unfamiliar in everyday life, often growing out of people's activities of working together on a problem from a shared engagement. This aspect of human agency and power, however, is under-conceptualized and often reduced to a somewhat mundane and naive aspect of everyday life; rarely examined in detail and frequently reduced to a trivial element of 'conviviality' (Neal et al., 2019, p. 70), which refers to the social skills deployed in everyday life such as good listening, being humble, curious, informative, and honest, finding common ground and managing disagreement, and avoiding frustration and fear when encountering differences and otherness. Often, these habits or skills are not considered worthy of translation into broader political discourse (with exceptions noted by Sennett, 2013; and Flyvbjerg, 2006). And if they are acknowledged, it is usually as a subset or derived effect of real politics, ignoring—again—the possibility that the foundation of political power may not reside in its formal institutions, strategic practices, and systems of representation, but rather in the hermeneutics of intersubjective practices and meaning that take place in everyday life. (Axel, 2020; Gidley, 2013; Højholt & Larsen, 2021; Lapina 2016; Schwartz & Nissen, 2023; Nissen, 2012; Samanani, 2022, Sargent et al., 2011; Wise & Velayutham, 2009; Watson & Anamik, 2013).

Power-with is not about formal representation or political projects that aim to empower and co-create by inviting people to respectfully engage in predefined activities or communities deemed to serve "the common good." Power-with doesn't emerge from having a consensus or common goals. Instead, it arises from social processes in which the common is produced in common, intertwining the development of power-with and the development of communities. Power-with is therefore not an epistemological project (as argued by Habermas, 1987) or simply a political pedagogy (as discussed by Arendt, 1958). Since power-with is always about something, it is not merely hermeneutics, but a worldly activity that

involves the joint creation of a shared social reality and practice, built on differences of perspectives and interests. Power-with can therefore be seen as a transformative social-worldly activity in which a transformative creation of intersubjective meaning and reality takes place.

Final thoughts - the long and short of it

There are at least two mayor approaches to the study of power. In one approach, power is facilitative; it refers to a “power to”, that is mainly seen as positive. The other approach to power is more widely known and stresses that power operates largely as domination and “power over”. This approach sees power as less of a facilitative capacity and more of a prohibitive one. This article disputes the notion that these approaches are mutually exclusive and incompatible. Instead, it proposes a dialectical concept of power that recognizes power as a dual quality that reflect and arise from reciprocal relationships between agentic potentials and their actualization; that mediate reciprocal connections between the particular and the general, past and future.

The normative quality of social power is not fixed. It is a both positive and negative productive force for agency. Relationships of power-over can be both domineering and transformative, making hierarchy and asymmetry not inherently problematic from a normative perspective. Additionally, agentic power-to can exist in both individual and collective forms and relate to a range of both competitive and collaborative processes, that create both division and unity. Therefore, we cannot determine the normative quality of a specific use of social power without considering its subjective, situational, and socio-material context.

The word ‘Power’ encompasses a dual meaning. Although such an understanding does not satisfy traditional criteria of clarity, it sheds light on why power is productive and not a topic psychology can just leave for other disciplines to study. The study of power also belongs to psychology. This article argues for a critical social psychology. Implicitly it also aims to explain, how the subject-scientific approach of German-Danish critical psychology and its framework of concepts and situated practice research can be seen to reflect an attention also to power relations and how to study power. This brings the discussion back to psychology in yet another way - as an important provider of interpretive frameworks for understanding not only human agency but also social power.

Just as there is no such thing as a fully private language, there is no individual power that is not indebted to uncountable contributions from others, from nature, and from human history. Current popular practices of attributing all the glory or blame to a single individual contributor thus simplify social reality in a way that not only allows for a false internalization of gains and externalization of costs but also for a misinterpretation of symptoms of social problems as their causes.

It is easy to imagine that what distinguishes agentic mastery—for example the experienced painter from the amateur—lies in a higher degree of control over

and independence from the materials used and the resources applied. However, I have tried to present a dialectical understanding of power that offers a different perspective, suggesting that what distinguishes human mastery and sets the experienced painter or theorist apart from the amateur is a more advanced form of collaboration. Antonio Stradivari (1644-1737), widely considered Italy's greatest violin maker, didn't attain excellence by imposing his will on his materials, but by working with them in unique ways. He knew and appreciated the qualities and strengths of different types of wood and their distinct reactions to moisture, heat, and sunlight, and he worked with, rather than against, the friction of its knots, twists, and movements. In other words, he approached friction in the world not just as a barrier to his agency but also as a potential resource for exploring more sophisticated forms of action, agency and "power". The same approach can be applied to social power and agency, and we can consider its potential relevance for understanding our current political problems.

I began this article with the following sentence: "Power is usually related to questions of how people can achieve their goals." I wish to end by returning to the notion of goals. Social practices and institutions, like scientific experiments, always include a more or less conscious framing of what we might call an opportunity space; a more or less set list of potential outcomes, similar to the result of rolling dice. The fact that power is productive means that our agentic powers expand and contract with the scope of the opportunity spaces we allow in social life and in our institutions. Since democracy is not defined by predefined goals, but is rather a practice that is a goal in itself, democratic power constitutes a form of power-with in which differences are put to work for, rather than against, the common good, so that the opportunity space—the space for possible outcomes—is never fully determined. Current issues of climate change, declining trust in democratic institutions, the rise of anti-science attitudes, and a pandemic of burnout and mental health problems collectively point to a deeper problem. I have argued that this problem might stem from a failure of our democratic institutions to secure, in a sufficient manner, the social foundation that is required to sustain them. If this is, in fact, the problem, these issues cannot be resolved by our institutions unless we change the way they currently operate. A more expanded opportunity space needs to be allowed for, both within and outside of them, that experiment with alternative forms of power. The concept of power-with aims to provide guidance for such experimentation and expansion.

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The subject of psychology: Seclusion, contraction, immobilisation, objectification, privatisation, and depoliticization^{1*}

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Abstract

The seclusion and contraction of subjects in their individualities makes possible their reduction to objects of power apparatuses—of the State, Patriarchy, Capital, and the so-called objective human sciences, including psychology. Nothing is easier than objectifying an individualised, deactivated, and weakened subject who has been plunged into impotence and immobility. It seems that Christianity and capitalist modernity first neutralised subjects, turning them into harmless, isolated individuals, and later objectified them, transmuting them into objects of political, economic, and ideological-scientific systems with psychological devices. The paradox is that psychology developed to support paralysed and powerless individuals, already objectified and neutralised as subjects, in dealing with their emotional, intellectual, or emotional problems. Although such problems are fundamentally political, cultural, or socioeconomic in origin, it is individuals who must take responsibility for them and alleviate them in apolitical ways in their private individual spheres. This depoliticization and privatisation of depression, stress, and anxiety is correlated with the privatisation of all other aspects of our lives in neoliberal capitalist societies. Finally, the possibility is considered that psychology is transformed so radically that it reverses the psychologising process that engenders it: the process of individualisation, contraction, objectification, and depoliticisation of subjectivity.

Keywords

psychology, subjectivity, objectivity, capitalism, neoliberalism

^{1*} This article would not be what it is if it had not benefited from the valuable feedback from Nick Malherbe and Nadir Lara Junior.

Individuality as the prison of the subject

There was a time when the protagonists of human history were hordes, clans, tribes, communities, and peoples. These groups embodied humanity. Human subjects were collective rather than locked into individuality. Their problems were primarily group problems, as were the solutions to those problems.

Of course, humans were always individuals, but they recognised themselves as elements of the whole (Tönnies, 1887/2002). They understood that their individual problems were part of a problematic totality that encompassed and internally constituted individuals. The individual subjects knew that they depended on their communities.

Gradually, individuals began to close in on themselves (Swift, 1926). This process lasted for centuries and occurred in parallel in most, but not all, civilisations. In the European context, Christianity partly aided this process from the end of antiquity to the dawn of modernity, passing through the long Middle Ages (see Marx 1843/1987a; Dumont, 1982). Since their appearance in the Western World, Christians always act as individuals when they perform good works, fall into temptation, commit sins, examine their consciences, confess, do penance, and ultimately go to heaven or hell.

What weighs in the balance of the final judgment is the individual soul. Likewise, this soul has weight in modern capitalist societies through individual votes and rights, individual wealth, and individual private ownership. Everything in modernity is centred on the individual soul, which represents humanity and condenses subjectivity.

Modern human subjects, inheritors of Christianity, are imprisoned in their individual souls. These souls are the prisons of their bodies. Consider this well: the body no longer ‘imprisons the soul’, as Plato believed (*Phaedo*, 82d–85b). Instead, as Michel Foucault (1975) stated, the soul has become ‘the prison of the body’ (p. 38). The contradiction between Plato and Foucault reveals a historical mutation. Something has changed between the ancient Greek society and the modern French society of the second half of the 20th century. Foucault inverted Plato to actualise it in a precise historical context.

Contraction, immobilisation, and objectification of the subject

History may have freed the soul, but at the cost of diminishing it to squeeze it through an individual funnel. In Greek antiquity, the great soul of the Athenian free man, overflowing individuality and unfolding in a political space, certainly had reason to feel imprisoned and suffocated in the narrow human body (Constant, 1819/2010). However, over time, the body has increasingly been trapped in a soul narrowed to individuality.

The individual soul continued to shrink and eventually became the object of psychology. This object, in its various psychological, mental, conscious, cognitive, personal, and other forms, results from what Herbert Marcuse (1964/2010) described as an ‘atrophy’, a ‘contraction’ and a ‘lost’ of the internal

world (pp. 102-108). In the tiny, individual, internal worlds in which they have been confined by psychology, subjects are oppressed and crushed, as if buried, and can scarcely move.

Psychological subjects move without moving, turn without doing anything or going anywhere, and agitate without acting, freeing themselves, or transforming their world. The ‘restrictive agency’ offered by psychology (Holzkamp, 1985/2013, pp. 23-26) makes subjects no longer look like subjects (Castro, 2013). Unsurprisingly, they are constructed as the opposite of what they are—as objects of psychology understood as objective science.

Long before the emergence of psychology as an independent objective science, Immanuel Kant (1781/2004, 1786/1971) and others (e.g. Hegel, 1807/1973; Herbart, 1816/1901) criticised the fundamental absurdity of psychological knowledge—its aim of objectifying the subjective, which is the only thing “unobjectifiable” by definition (see Pavón-Cuéllar, 2019a, pp. 17-19). Now, we should ask ourselves how this objectification has become possible. I am convinced that the answer lies in the reduction of subjects to their individual internal worlds.

As Rosa Luxemburg (1905/1985) and György Lukács (1923/1985) have shown, subjects reduced to their individuality are devoid of much that makes them ‘subjects’, not ‘objects’ (see Pavón-Cuéllar, 2017a, pp. 79-80, 83-85). This is the case regarding the capacity for action and transformation of the external sociocultural world. In general, this world can be transformed only by collective subjects, since individual subjects are condemned to ‘contemplate’, passively and resignedly, what they cannot ‘transform’ (see Lukács, 1923/1985, pp. 230-231).

In their powerlessness, contemplative individual subjects are the *objects* of what they cannot transform. For example, individuals cannot end capitalism, but they are usually objects of capitalist exploitation. They are also objects of government oppression, from which they cannot free themselves as individuals. Similarly, whether they are men or women, gay or heterosexual, European or Latin-American, they are objects of the colonial, racist, sexist, and hetero-patriarchal system.

In order not to be simple objects, the subjects should come together and constitute a collective subjectivity. This subjectivity, specifically in the form of a movement founded on a social class, is the only true subjectivity for Luxemburg and Lukács: the only one capable of acting and transforming oppressive systems instead of being the object of them. The tacit teaching of Luxemburg and Lukács is that we can only collectively exercise our subjectivity, while individually we are condemned to be objects of the systems that oppress us.

In Lacanian jargon, *the Big Other*—the way in which the symbolic systems of culture appear to the subject—always finds ways *to enjoy*—to possess and exploit—the individual as its object (see Lacan 1975/1999). An individualised subject is defenceless against the enjoyment of, for example, capital (Exposto & Rodríguez Varela, 2020; Pavón-Cuéllar, 2022). We can only resist such *jouissance* as collective subjects—as ourselves, rather than as insignificant individual *egos* that cannot even preserve the subject condition in the ultimate bastion of individuality.

The seclusion of subjects in their individualities makes it possible to reduce them to objects of power apparatuses—of the State, Patriarchy, Capital, and the so-called objective sciences, including psychology. Nothing is easier than objectifying a subject who is individualised, deactivated, weakened, and plunged into impotence and immobility. It seems that Christianity and capitalist modernity first neutralised subjects, turning them into harmless, isolated individuals, and later objectified them, transmuting them into objects of political, economic, and ideological-scientific systems with psychological devices.

Freedom and subjectivity for capital

The users of psychology are products of the previously summarised story: a long history of individualisation, contraction, immobilisation, and objectification of subjectivity. This history is the same one that has led to neoliberal capitalism (Harvey, 2007; Laval, 2007) in which the psychological perspective, in all its forms, is triumphant (Parker, 2007; De Vos, 2012). The psychology that individualises, contracts, immobilises, and objectifies us is perfectly compatible with a neoliberalism that reduces us to the condition of atomised and isolated individuals, who behave as passive objects of the overarching free market with its wide-ranging movement of commodities (Pavón-Cuellar, 2017b; Adams et al, 2019).

Neoliberalism can only liberate commodities at the expense of people. The inaugural demand of any neoliberal policy is that we give up our freedom to commodities, the market, and the enjoyment of capital. Capital thus frees itself to freely enjoy neoliberalism. In the current regime of free market and free competition, as in the old free trade criticized by Marx (1848/1987b), the only freedom is the ‘freedom of capital’ (p. 155).

Neoliberal capitalism not only surrenders our freedom to capital but also represents the culmination of a long process by which we transfer our subjectivity to capital itself (see Read, 2009). This capital is the supreme subject of neoliberalism, usurping the place of all other subjects and dominating them, as only the unique divinity did in the most dogmatic and intolerant of religious times. We have become creatures and servants of capital, its fundamentalist and terrorist believers, its crusaders, and its suicide bombers. We give our lives to capital, which can thus enjoy our lives by sucking and absorbing our blood ‘like a vampire’, according to Marx’s (1867/2008, pp. 178-179) famous metaphor in *Das Kapital*.

Individuals as enterprises of capital rather than entrepreneurs of themselves

We are thus faced with a strange situation in which we are the objects of vampirish capital that is the only subject of neoliberal capitalism. We lose sight of this situation when we accept the famous Foucauldian formula of neoliberal

individuals as ‘entrepreneurs of themselves who are their own capital, their own producers, the source of their income’ (Foucault, 1979/2007, pp. 264-265). Foucault’s phrase is quite ambiguous, since it leaves us with the impression that individuals are simultaneously subjects and objects—entrepreneurs and their enterprises—when it is clear that they are only the objects and enterprises *of* something that inhabits and possesses them, i.e. the capital they ‘personify’ (Marx, 1867/2008, p. 178).

Let us recognise, then, that neoliberal individuals are, as Foucault (1979/2007) stated, ‘permanent and multiple enterprises that encompass everything in their lives, including the relationships, for example, with their private property, with their family, with their partner, with their insurance, with their retirement’ (p. 277). This quote by Foucault is revealing because it shows us that the relationship of entrepreneurs with their enterprise is part of the enterprise. In other words, the condition of entrepreneurs, their lives, and their entrepreneurial relationships with themselves is the enterprise of something that must, therefore, transcend individuality (see Brown, 2015).

From a Marxist perspective, neoliberal individuals are not their own entrepreneurs but the enterprise of capital that possesses them and makes them function as their own entrepreneurs. Their actions are the performance of an alien role—the role of capital. Hence, the only subject is capital—the entrepreneur underpinning all entrepreneurs—while the individual is the enterprise—the object exploited by capital and playing the role of entrepreneur, thus personifying capital.

Individuals are the objects of capital exploitation and the capital that they personify, and they suffer directly from the effects of such exploitation, such as by experiencing feelings of emptiness, chronic fatigue, lack of energy or motivation, and depression. Moreover, if individuals are lucid enough and have penetrating Foucauldian sensitivity, they will conclude that their suffering is for all they have exploited themselves as entrepreneurs of themselves. They will thus reproach themselves for demanding too much of themselves, for being work addicts, for not knowing how to rest or enjoy, for not sleeping enough, and for sacrificing what is profoundly important—life, love, pleasure, friendship, and sustenance.

All the reproaches are correct, except for one detail: they address the wrong person. Individuals do not waste their own lives. What ruins the lives of individuals is the capitalist system and the capital that individuals personify, even when they blame themselves. Their reproaches must be included in the list of grievances attributable not to individuals as their own entrepreneurs but to the capital that owns them and that makes them exploit themselves and then blame themselves for their own exploitation.

Blaming ourselves and apologising to capital

I once conversed with a man suffering from terminal cancer who blamed himself for his illness and suffering. This individual sensed that his illness was associated

with certain personality traits. He was extremely serious, industrious, obedient, self-sacrificing, and responsible, to the extent that he took responsibility for his own illness. His words made me think that this desire to take responsibility for everything, including his cancer, was perhaps precisely what had caused the cancer. The problem was that he blamed himself for everything, even the blame itself, and thus took the blame for the system.

Blaming oneself—unloading the guilt of the system on oneself—has become a persistent rule of behaviour since Christianity and later capitalist modernity locked subjects within their individuality. Good Christians who flagellated themselves for their temptations and sinful desires were already taking the blame for Christianity, the prohibitions of which excited their desires and temptations. Christianity then gave way to capitalism—the true universal religion—which has caused tremendous physical and mental suffering in subjects who reproach themselves for their own suffering.

Some patients blame themselves for their diabetes and obesity when advertising has led them to become intoxicated and put on weight by eating fast food and ultra-processed foods with added sugar. Others attribute their cancers solely to their smoking or poor diet, completely forgetting the role of tobacco companies and the factories that poison city air, produce carcinogenic foods, or inundate the agricultural industry with fertilisers and pesticides. Pharmaceutical capital is also often forgotten by its millions of annual victims, who find ways to blame themselves with the help of their doctors.

Psychology as exoneration of the system, depoliticization, and privatisation of cultural discontent

Medicine is usually biased in blaming the sick for their illnesses and exonerating the system that makes them sick. This partiality towards the capitalist system can sometimes be observed in medical practice and occurs regularly in the field of psychology, which is inclined to presume the innocence of the system. Indeed, psychologists tend to deflect attention from capitalism, absolving it completely through the guiding principle that individuals are responsible for their problems and must solve them with the support of professionals.

For example, a cognitive-behavioural therapist can help individuals solve their problems of anxiety, stress, or depression by offering treatment that includes reinforcing certain behavioural patterns, programming for progressive activities, training in problem-solving, and supporting the development of useful skills for coping with stressful situations. The ultimate purpose of this therapy is to encourage individuals to think positively and release the negative thoughts, feelings, and behaviours that feed anxiety, stress, and depression. The assumption is that anxious, stressed, or depressed conditions result from the ways in which individuals feel, think, and behave. Individuals are to blame.

Individuals are accused of what the capitalist system does to them. In addition to being victims of capitalism, they are revictimized by psychology. They suffer double: because they suffer and because they reproach themselves

for being the cause of their suffering. Their suffering, in fact, can be triple when they are victims of positive psychology, because then they suffer not only because they suffer and because they consider themselves guilty of their suffering, but because the very fact of suffering, because suffering is not good, because people are not allowed to suffer even when the capitalist system torments them by all means (Cederström y Spicer, 2015).

The system is not even seen when it is destroying the world around us through climate change and the devastation of nature. We accuse ourselves of the planetary catastrophe for using straws, for eating meat daily, for travelling frequently by plane, for driving a car several hours a day, or for changing smart phones or computers from time to time. It is true that these practices contribute to the environmental cataclysm, but the fundamental responsibility lies with capitalism, which has created devastating needs to ensure consumption and the profits linked to that consumption. All of this is missed by psychologists who, even when dealing with environmental issues, forget the capitalist environment and focus on the individual (e.g. Clayton et al, 2015; Nielsen et al, 2021). The key is in the individual sphere, although sometimes a little influenced by family and social factors.

Psychologists talk about society in order not to look bad, but the truth is that they do not know what to do with it. Hence, they project it as far away as possible in time and space, where it becomes invisible to them—either in the past, confusing it with the family, or behind the wall of the immediate environment, in the socioeconomic and structural background that supposedly cannot be transformed and to which it is necessary to adapt. Finally, for myopic, amnesiac, individualistic, and presentist psychology, only the present and narrow, private, individual spheres remain, where individuals, assisted by psychologists, manoeuvre.

Psychology, in general, starts from the premise that individuals must cope with their emotional, intellectual, or behavioural problems. Although these problems are fundamentally political, cultural, or socioeconomic in origin, it is individuals who must take responsibility for them and solve them in apolitical ways in their private individual spheres. This ‘depoliticisation’ and ‘privatisation’ of depression, stress, and anxiety, as Mark Fischer (2011) claimed, is correlated with the privatisation of all other aspects of our lives under neoliberal capitalism. It can be said that neoliberalism not only privatises culture but also cultural discontent and multiple sufferings in an increasingly privatised culture, progressively subsumed in capitalism.

Cope better with the world, or fight for a better world?

In almost all cultural spheres, the individual must solve the problems caused by the enjoyment of capital. Although capital enjoys, individuals pay the bill. This new form of exploitation, which is an extension of economic exploitation in the classical sense, requires psychology to justify itself by holding subjects responsible for their problems.

From a perspective of positive psychology and cognitive-behavioural models, for example, individuals are fundamentally depressed because of negative thinking (e.g. Teasdale, 1983; Norem & Chang, 2002). This thinking is the important thing. Positive and cognitive-behavioural psychologists rarely show interest in the structural causes of their patients' negative thinking, such as the negative reality in which they live, the cultural misery that surrounds them, life imprisonment in their individual prisons, their exploitation as workers and consumers, or their degrading conditions as objects of the enjoyment of capital.

There is enough evidence that capitalism and neoliberalism cause a variety of mental health problems, including depression and anxiety (Prins et al, 2015; Eisenberg-Guyot & Prins, 2022). This is understandable (see Mathews, 2019; Zeira, 2022). The capitalist system is quite depressing. How can we avoid becoming depressed in this world turned into a market in which increasingly interested relationships prevail? This world is becoming increasingly unstable, insecure, and troubling. How can we not be stressed and anxious in the face of neoliberalism, with its progressive acceleration, law of the jungle, job insecurity, accumulating debt, and ultimate devastation of the planet?

Of course, distressing problems and stressful situations interest cognitive-behavioural psychologists, who respond by offering training in problem-solving and the development of useful skills for dealing with stressful situations. However, what we learn in cognitive-behavioural psychology is to be skilled at dealing with stressful situations—not to be skilful in overcoming these situations when confronted by the neoliberalism that creates them. Similarly, we are not trained to escape the troubled capitalist system, but only to solve the distressing problems it causes.

Cognitive-behavioural psychologists, like almost any other type of psychologist, may justify themselves with the quite reasonable argument that they can only help individuals to deal with the world, but not to change it, since individuals cannot change the world. The most that psychology can offer individuals is change in their relationships with the world—change that makes the world less distressing, stressful, and depressing for them. The point here is that individuals who are less depressed, stressed, and distressed by the world have less reason to want to change that world.

Why do we participate in collective action to try to transform society when we can simply ask psychologists to transform our perceptions of society and our attitude towards it? Is it not easier and faster to seek psychologists to help free us from our negative thinking than to create a revolution to free ourselves from negative reality? The answer is yes: in this case, as in others, curing a disease is slower, more difficult, and more uncertain than alleviating its symptoms.

The problem with simply relieving symptoms is that the alleviation does not cure the disease. Instead, it allows the disease to progress. Capitalism thus continues to gain ground at the expense of humanity and nature. In the last 50 years, during the neoliberal phase of the capitalist system, we have not only witnessed the precariousness of our existence and the worsening of inequalities but also the disappearance of more than half the fertile land and animal populations on our planet (Kolbert, 2014; Ceballos et al, 2017).

Something better than psychology?

We are losing our planet, thus endangering our very existence as humans. This capitalist terminal illness can only be avoided if we escape from the narrow individual prisons in which we have been locked and snatch our subjectivity away from capital. We must stop being objects of capital and its devices, including psychology, and become collective subjects who can fight against capital through social movements and political organisations.

We need to recover the political, social, and subjective selves that are lost when we are psychologised. This requires us to leave behind the individual, apolitical objects of psychological science, and re-subjectify ourselves and re-collectivize our subjectivity through formations such as communist camaraderie, feminist sisterhood, and even religious brotherhood understood in a progressive and anti-capitalist sense, as in certain forms of Liberation Theology. The question is whether all this should make us abandon psychology for good.

Perhaps psychology is capable of transforming itself so radically that it reverses the psychologising process that engenders it: the process of individualisation, contraction, objectification, and depoliticisation of subjectivity. Maybe psychology will find a way to reconstitute collective and political subjects—the only subjects capable of opposing capital. This possibility has already been partially realised by critical, radical, and liberation psychologies, as well as by certain political and community psychological proposals, revealing that psychology need not necessarily be condemned as a capitalist device (see Parker, 2015; Pavón-Cuéllar, 2017c, 2019b).

Capitalism has been repeatedly challenged by psychology. The psychological field is a battlefield: it is a field not only for the domination of capitalism, but also for the struggle against capital. Although the field—as we have tried to show in this article—is not neutral and is already predetermined in some way in favour of the capitalist system, this does not exclude the possibilities of resistance and even subversion.

Past experiences teach us that capitalism loses control over those psychological proposals that commit themselves to collective and political anti-capitalist projects or movements. This external anchorage is essential. Psychology must come out of itself and must also collectivize and politicize itself to be able to escape capitalism and reconstitute collective and political subjects.

In fact, psychology has the potential to be an important ally of anti-capitalist movements and become less psychology than something better (e.g.; Parker, 2020; Parker & Pavón-Cuéllar, 2021; Malherbe, 2022). We clearly need something better than psychology (Parker, 2007). It does not matter if we continue to call it ‘psychology’, but it can no longer be what it has been until now.

Psychology should be deconstructed and rebuilt as something better (Parker, 2014). Only something better can help us to return to being the groups, communities, and peoples that we once were and that we can still be today when we act collectively to change our destinies. We can be something other than the

subject of psychology. We don't deserve its seclusion, contraction, immobilisation, objectification, privatisation, and depoliticization.

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The politics of unconscious desire under virtual global capitalism

Kathleen Skott-Myhre & Hans Skott-Myhre

Abstract

The question of politics and psychology in the 21st century is increasingly fraught. This article interrogates psychology's relationship with emerging global capitalism. It takes up psychology's relationship to the emerging mode of production known as immaterial labor. The article argues that the emerging realm of virtual technologies has immense implications for psychology in recalibrating such fundamental conceptual fields as development and neurology, sublimation, and desire. Finally, a proposal is made for a reconfigured psychology that can build on the shifts in 21st century modes of production and shifts in consciousness to challenge global capitalism and initiate new forms of subjectivity with capacity to create new worlds and new peoples.

Keywords

Neurology, immaterial labor, consciousness, time, Marx, Spinoza

The question of politics and psychology in the 21st century is increasingly fraught. In what follows, we propose to interrogate psychology in its relationship with emerging global capitalism. We will take up psychology's relationship to the emerging mode of production known as immaterial labor (Hardt and Negri, 2005), as well as its ongoing complicity in producing forms of linguistic ideological obfuscation of capitalism as a system of exploitation and oppression. We will argue that the emerging realm of virtual technologies has immense implications for psychology in recalibrating such fundamental conceptual fields as development and neurology, sublimation, and desire. Finally, we will make a proposal for a reconfigured psychology that can build on the shifts in 21st century modes of production and shifts in consciousness to challenge global capitalism and found new forms of subjectivity with capacity to create new worlds and new peoples.

We begin with the assertion that, as we engage the early decades of the 21st century, human activity is reshaping the global landscape at all levels of living force. As Felix Guattari (2005) asserts in his work on how we might conceptualize the ecological realm, the Anthropocene is not only radically altering the geophysical world and the biophysical world, but human activity is

also forever altering the unconscious and neurological production of our relational fields of intersubjectivity. In other words, the Anthropocene is demonstrably opening new vistas of colonization, appropriation, and exploitation of those elements of human life that constitute the foundation of all political acts (McKewan, 2021). Indeed, we might say that the very capacity to think and act collectively as an assertion of living force is entering the territory of an endangered species.

Of course, an endangered species is not an extinct species, and there are still multiple acts of resistance and critical thought emergent across the landscape of global virtual capital. That said, there is little doubt in our minds that the tendency of social modes of subjectification are moving powerfully and incontrovertibly to appropriate and exploit living creative force. It has always been the goal of capitalism to dominate everything that comes within its grasp, animate and inanimate. The last four hundred years have incurred a global level of brutality exacted on all elements of the material world. We might say that the past four centuries have focused specifically on material bodies, including plants, animals (both human and more than human), geologies, bodies of water, all the way down to atomic and subatomic structures. The ever-increasing enslavement of every element of the planet to the abstract dictates of the money sign and its minions, has resulted in untold levels of impoverishment and destitution (Shepard, 2016).

While there are those who would argue that life for some human beings has improved (Obhof, 2003), we argue that the cost for such “progress” is not only unfathomable, but the effects are transitory and inherently unstable. Those who reaped the rewards of greater physical comfort in the form of heat, cooling, medical care, travel, and physical security are facing an erosion of quality and quantity of the standard of living built on the shifting sands of capitalism’s indifference to its effects. As climate change advances, and capitalism’s hunger for ever-increasing levels of abstract wealth escalates, the vast majority of living things will suffer an endlessly degraded environment of mass extinctions, and the scarcity of the basic elements that support life (McKewan, 2021).

Immaterial Labor

In the face of this escalating crisis of bodies, a concomitant incursion into our modes of sociality, intellectual and artistic creative capacity, and neurology have emerged. Hardt and Negri (2005) have referred to this as immaterial labor. They note a shift in the mode of production from industrial capitalism to global virtual capitalism. Of course, like all transitions from one mode of production to the next, mixed modes of production always entail all aspects of human creativity.

Using an example from an earlier mode of production, we did not abandon the agricultural mode that preceded industrialization when we moved into industrial capitalism with its emphasis on factories and Fordist modes of technology. We still grow crops, but as industrialization advances, the way we grow crops becomes increasingly mechanized, and the subjective identity

associated with farming refers to smaller and smaller percentages of the population. Indeed, in many cases, the farmer becomes a cipher that stands in for large multinational corporations who have taken over the land previously stolen from indigenous populations, colonized by the state, and allotted to settler families. The family farm, like the nuclear family, was a transitional and relatively short-term phenomenon that opened the door to ever-increasing technological appropriation by capital (Voegeler, 2019).

We would propose that we are living through a similar shift in the mode of production and the production of the political. Marx (2005) emphasizes the force of human productive labor as ever shifting, mutating, and evolving in a series of ecological entanglements that produce new modes of production, governance, and sociality. We create our social systems and forms of governance. They are not handed down through some form of divine dispensation. The systems that currently entangle and enslave us are built and sustained by our participation and continued creative activities. If the world of human society is to change, we are the ones who will change it. Indeed, we are the ones who are changing it, every minute and every hour of every day. That said, our relation to change is complicated because we live in a world composed of a system of dominance predicated in deception and sleight of hand.

Sorcery and Sleight of Hand

Building on Marx¹, Stengers and Pignarre (2011) delineate what they call the spell of capitalist sorcery. They call for an understanding of capitalism as the ultimate trickster, who routinely disassociates the actuality of our material lived experience and throws us into what Laing (2016) called a living dream or a state of trance. To understand this, Stengers and Pignarre argue that we cannot continue to root ourselves in the very language that underlies the sorcerer's hypnotic patter. The tools of Western European thought and philosophy are precisely the vehicles through which capitalism casts itself and, perhaps even more importantly, the curtain behind which the machinations of the magician's sleight of hand are hidden from view. Stengers and Pignarre argue that the faux rationality of capitalist science and its minions would have us think that psychic intrusions into the way we perceive the world and our identity within it are simply superstitious throwbacks to more "primitive" ways of perceiving the politics of domination and oppression.

This mode of ideological obfuscation would have us believe that intuition and body wisdom are archaic registers of a world long left in the dustbins of history. The argument is that if there is such a phenomenon of capitalist black-magic, it can only be bested in light of rationality, reason, and science. The truth is to be found in the portrayals of the world as an infinite progression of growth, driven by the power of individual creativity, as we overcome the limitations of nature through unimpeded technological growth.

¹ Marx's (2019) invocation of capitalism as a sorcerer in the communist manifesto

In this vision of anthropocentric politics, each human is the master of their own destiny and their own fate. According to the great wizards of the capitalist empire, we are all fated to be all we can be, if we just work hard enough, train hard enough, think carefully enough, and divorce ourselves from silly unrealistic superstitions that keep us from having a clear head and focused vision. For us, this is the most dangerous kind of superstition that not only blinds us to the conditions of our own oppression, but simultaneously keeps us numb enough to make it from day to day.

Superstition and Virtual Capital

Spinoza (2000) takes it as his philosophical mission to banish superstition. However, superstition for Spinoza is not simply a question of what is true or not true. Instead, Spinoza's descriptions of the world are either adequate or inadequate to account for the infinite complexity of relations that produce everything. For him distinguishing truths from falsehoods is relatively unimportant, although it is worth doing. What is more important is determining the level of inadequacy inherent in each description and how such inadequacies produce worlds of thought and action. In other words, for Spinoza, superstitions are essential to identify in order to understand their capacities. That is, not whether they are true or false, but what they can do.

We would argue that this is particularly important as we enter the world of global virtual capitalism with its endless vistas of simulacra, superstition, and grand lies. Many of us raised in the dying sunset of modernity were taught that such a great deceiver as virtual capital could be defeated simply by speaking truth to power. We were taught that if the truth behind the lies about the conditions of our oppression were spread far and wide, there would be a great revolutionary awakening. We could defeat the minions of capital by showing them to be false gods.

And they are false gods indeed. However, just because they have no material reality, does not mean they have no real effect. The realm of their very powerful effectuation is in the world of virtual social media and its associated extensions in schools, financial institutions, government institutions, churches, health care, mental health, and families, to name but a few. In truth, it is somewhat challenging to identify a segment of contemporary life that is not infiltrated or affiliated with some aspect of virtual media content. We live in a world saturated with such content. For many of us, substantial portions of our days are spent in front of screens that project and process information that produce goods and services, as well as increasingly virtual forms of sociality and subjectivity.

New Forms of Sociality and Subjectivity

These virtual forms of sociality and subjectivity have direct implications for who we imagine ourselves to be. In this regard, Moeller and D'Ambrosio (2021) refer

to the production of a new form of identity they refer to as prolificity or the self-reflexive production of ourselves on social media, where we create a representation of ourselves for the consumption of others who view our profile. This profile is skewed in significant ways and shaped by our perception of the other profiles we are consuming. Our profile is recursively shaped and reshaped to fit the proliferating field of social trends and demands that are produced and reproduced in an ever-shifting information flow. Our capacity to reconcile our material lived experience with our virtual modes of self-expression is often significantly challenged on at least two levels: temporality and absolute abstraction.

In terms of temporality, our experience of the material world operates at a certain speed. In other words, we perceive the material world within a mode of temporality that allows us to maneuver through the world at speeds that work within the frames of body/mind coordination. The speed of our engagement with the material world has been increasing steadily since the inception of industrial technologies. To move from the speed of walking, to the speed of the horse-drawn carriage, to the automobile, and to the speed of an airplane has demanded a reconfiguration of our body's response times and a reshaping of something as simple as our eye-hand coordination (Deleuze, 1986).

Foucault (2012) suggests that this is not a politically neutral shift. Instead, it is a mode of discipline that not only reshapes our bodies to conform to the requirements of an increasingly technological mode of production, but is also a method of social control in which we are gradually acclimated to ongoing supervision and training that becomes increasingly internalized. The modes of discipline initially exercised from the outside become standards of excellence and competence that define who we are and how we see ourselves. The ever-increasing speed of material production at all levels of society plays a role in obfuscating the relationship between self-discipline and social control.

Time

Our very conception of time is mediated in all historical periods (Casarino, 2003). Clock time, for example, mediates time within the industrial context, so that minutes and hours of labor can be monetized. There is very little need for clock time in traditionally agricultural contexts, where time is measured by daylight and the necessity to complete tasks between sunrise and sunset. The mediation here is the ability to read the light daily, but also in terms of seasonal changes in light that affects crop growth and the biological rhythms of animals and humans. The sense of time between the rhythm of the industrial clock and the rhythm of agricultural time holds radical variances in both speed and rhythm.

Perhaps the best example of this is the establishment of daylight savings time. The popular justification for switching the clock back an hour or forward an hour was premised on the need for farmers to have more daylight to work. However, agricultural time is not related in any meaningful way to clock time. Unlike a factory or a business, farms do not open or close in response to a clock.

The labor of a farm is not an hourly endeavor, but related to sheer production, and the time available to work is determined by light and weather rather than by the clock. Daylight savings was never about saving daylight for farmers. That was not ever necessary, and farmers have been one of the strongest political voices against daylight savings. The origins of daylight savings are due to attempts to save energy during wartime and the desire for hobby enthusiasts to have more free daylight time after work in the summer months (Livingston, 2019). In other words, these are investments premised on clock time.

What is of note to us here, once again, is the shift and tension between modes of production. In the mode of agricultural production, time is of a different nature, mediated by circadian rhythms and intensities of sunlight at different times of the day. In the industrial mode of production, time is mediated by the clock, and we get work and leisure defined by the factory clock that tells us when we must work and when we can have leisure. For the farmer, leisure occurs as dictated by task necessity. The farmer can relax when it is no longer possible or necessary to work. The industrial laborer can only relax when the clock time defined by the capitalists says work is done now.

It is important to point out that in the 21st century, the speed of material production is vastly increasing as we enter the virtual realm. As we move from industrial time to virtual time, there are new tensions and contradictions. Lohmeier, Kaun, and Pentzold (2020) sketch the complexities of temporal relations as we engage the world of virtual media. They note that it is not simply a matter of acceleration, although that has considerable implications for how we produce ourselves and are produced within a virtual context. They note that time and media constitute a complex nexus of contradictory struggles and ruptures. The newly emergent technologies speed up how information is processed and presented to us. We have instantaneous access to a seemingly infinite amount of data arriving through an array of screens at work, at home, in our hands, and on our wrists. The constant flow of information we receive via e-mails, texts, social media platforms, introjected advertisements and enticements, and internet searches we initiate as serious forms of inquiry or as casual exercises of curiosity move at astonishing speeds. We can process some of this information consciously, but it would be fair to say that quite a lot is processed subliminally and effectuates a range of unconscious processing modes.

However, Lohmeier et al. suggest that our sense of time is even more powerfully altered by what they call datafication. Datafication refers to how the information about our lives is processed through an ever-proliferating array of algorithms that automate how we make judgments, evaluate things, and most importantly, how we make decisions. The complex array of data processing points that we engage in during our daily lives gives us a powerful stream of constant data that overcodes our phenomenological experience of the life world and colonizes it with increasingly abstract modes of signification. These algorithmic forms of coalescing and processing the data of our lives are extracted from the field of our social relations and fed back to us, translated into capitalist sets of value. The way data is collected and processed operates outside of lived time.

In the virtual world of post-industrial capitalism, the algorithms deployed draw from our memories, our contemporary experience, and projections of future desire. The commonplace ad campaign that states or infers that the *future is now* is premised on how data about future probabilities is mediated through vast computer networks running possible scenarios of virtual futures at atomic speeds. In the virtual world, the future is continually being produced now and streamed to us in ways that collapse time into a series of temporal multiplicities that leave us disoriented and yearning for a way to enter the time of our lives as participants rather than subjects alienated from our own experience. The quantification and transformation of all of the elements of our lives into digital streams that simultaneously weave our nostalgia for a past that no longer exists into a future imploded into a present where we never arrive.

In his ever more prescient “Postscript on the Society of Control,” Gilles Deleuze (2017) refers to this as a society of infinite postponement. In his account, virtual capitalism seduces us into a world in which we are constantly denied any sense of actual accomplishment. The process of infinite postponement is a profound perversion of the logic of what Deleuze calls infinite becoming. Infinite becoming is a proliferating set of acts and expressions that have their origins in the sets of living relations that extend our capacities for expression. Infinite becoming, then, is quite different from the system of infinite deferral in which our capacities are brutally reconfigured to the necessities of a capitalist economy that leaves us in a state of lack and desperate longing.

Lohmeier et al. refer to this as a “form of colonizing the lifeworld in order to extract value from social relations” (p. 1522). They note that datafication is all pervasive and “marks a new stage of capitalism . . . [that] establish both new economic and temporal regimes that dominate globally” (p. 1522-23). We would note that this predatory mode of temporality not only controls our behavior but also has the capacity to reshape our kinesthetic rhythms and patterns of life. This may well provide access to our modes of unconscious desiring production. That is to say, this virtual process that collapses modes of temporality can seriously interfere with our conscious capacity for processing information. As our conscious mind is overwhelmed, the task of making sense shifts to the autonomic nervous system.

Those familiar with hypnosis will recognize this as a common trance induction. The hypnotist uses patter (script) that challenges the ability of our conscious awareness to create linear sense. As this occurs, our autonomic nervous system begins to pull us back from the confusion, causing us to “space out.” To alleviate the cognitive dissonance, the hypnotist suggests that we simply relax and let go, shifting the processing of information first to the body and then the unconscious.

We might also recognize this as a trauma response. We could certainly argue that the combination of speed, information overload, depersonalization of virtual information flows, and an autonomic sense of threat could be traumatic. The paradoxical formulation of this double imperative to let go and relax on behalf of virtual capital and to be hypervigilant on the part of our autonomic

nervous system may well create the current proliferation of anxiety, depression, and suicidal rage against ourselves and others we see in contemporary society.

Difference

If temporality constitutes one critical element in the practice of capitalist sorcery, then another vital element may be immersion in a world of absolute abstraction. Gregory Bateson (2000) tells us that communication is information that makes a difference. Similarly, Gilles Deleuze (1994) centers difference as the central element in the production of identity. However, difference for both these thinkers is not a binary delineation between pre-existing properties. Difference is the production of what we call *becoming capacity* or the material actuality of the virtual as infinite possibility. What is central for us here is that difference in the production of thought or materiality brings the virtual into actual thought or action. Alternatively, as a binary distinction, difference creates an abstract distinction rooted in language as, what Deleuze and Guattari (1987) call the *order word*.

Difference as a function of linguistic nominalization orders the world by defining this thing from that thing. We learn that things are differentiated from one another taxonomically and hierarchically. This mode of ordering the world into this versus that has a secondary effect. When we accept how we have used language as a function of society to order the world, we also engage in the process of ordering ourselves in relation to the world of difference rooted in language. As such, we begin to order our bodies, thoughts, and actions based on how we are taught to define ourselves; male/female, white/black, gay/straight, intelligent/stupid, rich/poor and so on. This binary ordering of the world situates vital elements of identity within an abstract framework of difference that reflects a set of power relations through which social relations are ordered. As an entirely virtual form, the world of cyber order works precisely within the development of abstract binary configurations that branch out in an always expanding network that orders us into categories of this vs. that in ever finer gradations. Of course, this abstract set of orders has powerful effects, but is held in dynamic tension and contradiction with the co-evolutionary imperatives of living difference.

In a recent book review of a book about Herbert Marcuse, Ian Parker (2022) notes an early formulation of how what was at the time emerging virtual capitalism orders reality. Marcuse describes a variation of reality that drives us to perform as an essential aspect of our identity formation. Prefiguring the work of Moeller and Ambrosio, Marcuse tells us that this is the mandatory drive to perform ourselves as “little masters of others and of ourselves” (Parker 2022, np). Of course, this is akin to the work done later by Judith Butler (2002). However, Marcuse adds what we see as an essential element of identity formation in our contemporary period: a claustrophobic recursive folding in on the self in an infinite series of folds or spirals that lock us into ourselves and alienates us from the world of living relations. Marcuse notes an element of

addictive propensity to this form of identity formation that appears to offer what Parker (2022) terms “an alluring and toxic illusion of freedom” (np).

For Marcuse, freedom in this accounting is premised on the freedom to express ourselves through our performances. However, the self-recursive nature of such performances is both profoundly insular and premised on predetermined social tropes. Our enjoyment is far from any relation to what Spinoza (2000) would term joy as the expression of the unique capacities of each body as unique and idiosyncratic singularities. Instead, our performances take all that makes us an unrepeatable assertion of living capacity and turns it to the dictates of capitalist necessity. As Parker (2022) notes,

This is, Marcuse argues, ‘controlled liberalization’ that is still repressive. It looks and feels like we are releasing something that has been channelled, ‘sublimated’ into this ‘vicious circle of progress’ of commodity culture, but it is repressive, it is what Marcuse calls ‘repressive desublimation.’ (np)

Repressive desublimation might well be the hallmark of social media within the identity formations of the 21st century. In Marcusean terms, repressive sublimation eradicates actual difference in Deleuzian or Batesonian terms. Any living fragments of difference as becoming are mediated and flattened into difference as sheer binary delineation. The move here is to take the force of living creative force as difference and translate it into the entropic linguistic formulations of sales and the money sign. Everything becomes a commodity, which opens vistas of appropriation into the realm of our capacities to think, create, and dream.

Psychology, Virtuality, and Consciousness

Luhmann (1995) refers to the social system that has emerged as virtual capital as a set of social relations radically dissociated from living things, but profoundly influential in how we order ourselves. In his work on the media, Luhmann (2000) describes a system that inadvertently exerts social control. Oddly, Luhmann posits the media as a recursive set of information flows that generates what he calls a *transcendental illusion*. In his formulation, the media produces a communication system built on binary distinctions between what is media and what is not. This system is built on observations that produce facts without directly engaging with what is observed. The media produces itself without regard to the living subjects that provide the foundation of its observations. For Luhmann, the media is sheerly technological and disseminates itself through an ever-proliferating and expanding system of mediating machinery that takes the becoming difference of life and reproduces it as an absolute binary abstraction. In this sense, it has no interest in what is true or false. The media is only interested in creating a binary difference that can be disseminated in ways that perturb the realm of living subjects and allow for more observational data that can be mediated into abstract formulations that create further perturbations. To produce

this binary difference, the media must search for information that goes beyond, and preferably violates, earlier information to create surprising or novel information that can be reported or disseminated. As Luhmann (2000) states, “The system presupposes itself as a self-producing irritation, without being accessible through its own operations, and then sets about transforming irritation into information, which it produces for the society (and for itself in society)” (p. 12).

When Luhmann wrote this in the late 20th century, the system he described was in its initial stages. Technology was advancing, but still being developed, and the human element in print and broadcast media still held a moderate if partial role. As we enter the second decade of the 21st century, it would be hard to disentangle our consciousness or sense of self from the escalating effects of our media-saturated environment. Certainly, we could read this as the historical moment Marx predicted in the *Fragment on Machines*, where human consciousness is embedded in a global network of machinery as modes of connectivity between machines. Marx (2005) states that,

The production process has ceased to be a labour process in the sense of a process dominated by labour as its governing unity. Labour appears, rather, merely as a conscious organ, scattered among the individual living workers at numerous points of the mechanical system; subsumed under the total process of the machinery itself, as itself only a link of the system, whose unity exists not in the living workers, but rather in the living (active) machinery, which confronts his individual, insignificant doings as a mighty organism. (p. 693)

The question for us is twofold: Does this shift in the mode of production call for a shift in the way we approach the political, and does psychology have a role to play? To both questions, we would answer in the affirmative and suggest that in the emerging cyber-dominated global capitalist society all questions of liberation must include an analysis of how our consciousness and the productive capacities of unconscious desire are being appropriated and exploited by the machinery we have been delineating so far. In this analysis, the place of psychology is founded on the role that psychology plays as the field of thought most engaged in how we understand and practice modes of conscious and unconscious awareness.

Although the unconscious has a history that dates back to antiquity, by inference, and was an element in the writing of romantic poets such as Schelling and Coleridge, it was the work of Freud that brought the concept into popular and professional parlance (Woodman, 1980). Over the past century, it has been psychology and psychoanalysis that has utilized the term as a significant aspect of theory and practice. That said, the American version of behavioral and neurological psychology has largely dispensed with the concept (Fuller, 1986). In our analysis here, we are reintroducing the term into a reading of contemporary psychology that opens it within contemporary readings of neurology and the brain.

To engage the question of psychology as a political project within the world of 21st-century cyberculture, we would suggest that the term politics requires some examination. As Foucault (2012) points out, politics is the assertion of

power in its manifestation as *puissance* (dominant power over) and as *pouvoir* (living creative force). In the first instance of *puissance*, we have the exercise of the power of constraint through the application of varying forms of violence, both physical and psychological. In the 21st century, this can take the form of physical war, torture, incarceration, or police action, among other forms of violence inflicted on the body. It can also take the form of psychiatric medication, cyberbullying, precarious labor, social instability, never-ending vistas of debt, and other forms of violence to our psychological and neurological sense of self. The double weaving of violent force to constrain and delimit the full capacity of what we can do takes both a state and corporate form, although the boundaries between the two are ephemeral at best. Indeed, we might follow Hardt and Negri (2001) in referring to the current form of dominant rule as a new form of Empire premised on the virtual capacities of cyber capitalism.

The fact that this form of Empire has opened new vistas of appropriation into the domain of what, in one term, we call our neurology, and in another term, our desiring unconscious has significant implications for politics in the 21st century and psychology in particular. In this regard, we would argue that the question of desire and its relation to the political becomes ever more pressing for a politics that asserts *pouvoir* against the dominating force of Empire's *puissance*.

The shift in the mode of production we have been outlining has taken the very definition of desire and produced a psychology of the cyber subject premised on a very particular reading of our subjectivity. The subjective desire of a global cyber Empire is rooted in a long lineage of philosophies of Empire and the state. The legacy of these modes of thought relies on a repudiation of the earth and materiality as an entirely sufficient autopoietic system in favor of an appeal to a transcendent realm of perfect form far exceeding the imperfect and corrupted Earth.

Desire and Lack

This lineage of desire always seeks greater degrees of perfection that cannot be fully attained, leaving the subject in an ever-present state of lack. Rather than seeking harmonious relations with the existing ecological system in which the subject is embedded, the lacking subject seeks to constantly "improve" the world according to a set of standards that bear little relation to the actual material conditions of lived experience. This constant drive to do more and better opens the subject as an insecure and definitionally insufficient form of subjectivity who never arrives, but is driven to meet expectations set by an abstract system of perfect form.

It is this world of abstract perfection that the current mode of production deploys to enter the world of desire rooted in lack and splays in infinite iteration across the cyber social. This is cyber capitalism as a relentless predator that feeds upon our deepest insecurities to access and mobilize the actuality of our desire, which is not founded on lack but plenitude. The field of politics becomes the

struggle between desire as the relational capacity to act rooted in the ecological force of life itself and desire as lack founded in a binary system of abstract dualities.

Framing political processes as ecologies of relational capacity opens a field of thought and action whose foci are the ongoing and unending tensions at all levels of contestation between abstract forms of becoming and becoming as the expression of living force. In positing political relations in this way, the political is seen as an inherent and ceaseless struggle. For those of us interested in liberatory modes of psychology, this infers that in the politics of the 21st century, any politics founded in forms of an ideal outside will be appropriated to the ends of cyber capital and used as a vehicle to induce the insecurity necessary to produce docile subjects overdetermined to use their creative living force in exchange for the promised utopias that never arrive.

If we are to read psychology within this framing of the contemporary political field, it is crucial that we determine psychology's function. We suggest that this requires reading it against the abstract field of disciplinary enclosure developed through its articulation as a handmaiden of industrial capitalism, as well as its permutations as a series of control logarithms within postmodern virtual capitalism (Deleuze, 1992). The aspect of psychology that produces it as simultaneously ideal for deployment by capital as an extension of the logic of rule and as a profoundly subversive set of possibilities lies in its articulation of states of consciousness, capacities for action, and the biomechanical production of deviance. In a discursive deployment of these domains of human activity and underlying structural capacity, each becomes what Deleuze and Guattari (1987) call an apparatus of capture. As we have noted, in producing them within the confines of language, they operate as the *order word* (Deleuze and Guattari, 1987). Each is subjected to taxonomic and hierarchical delineations that continually foreclose and delimit their social function.

For example, consciousness is created as a binary formation of the conscious and unconscious. The relation between the two is set out as the contestation between reason and unreason, savage, primitive desire and civilization, perversion and normality. Our capacities for subjectivity are founded in a prefigured structural incapacity for apprehending the actuality of our lived experience. Because that apprehension is defined as fundamentally linguistic, other modes and alternative ways of articulating ourselves are marginalized and subjugated.

Likewise, our capacity for action within the framework of traditional psychology is founded on a conflicted set of desires premised on the primary relations of lack we delineated above. Psychology places us against an ideal set of normative standards premised on the colonial registers of inherent competition and the drive to succeed and exceed the other, even when the other is ourselves. No act holds singular value as capacity. All acts are measured against an embedded system of value that valorizes profit. Our capacity to act is valorized to the degree it can be monetized through the particular mechanisms of appropriation within the development of capitalism. In other words, psychology will produce taxonomies and hierarchies of valorized acts differently under

industrial capitalism than it does under virtual postmodern capitalism. Different acts at different historical moments will be configured as an ever-proliferating field of diagnoses, exceptionalities, and mysteries.

For example, autism and ADHD emerged in the latter half of the twentieth century and expanded as both deficit (behaviorally in schools) and exceptionality (cogent sets of skills for working in the virtual environment). Indeed, these two diagnoses (autism and ADHD) open vast fields of research that use science's most reductive capacities to delineate and proscribe the biomechanics of our brain. Neuro-psychology is rapidly colonizing the discipline of psychology as the apparatus of control that reduces our capacities for experience to electrical transits and chemical exchanges in different regions of the physical organ delineated as our brain (Moncrieff, 2008; Sampson, 2016).

As one can see, this form of psychology is the emerging face of psycho-fascism in the 21st century. Where the psycho-fascism of the twentieth century sought to produce docile bodies that could be behaviorally molded to the factory, 21st-century psycho-fascism seeks docile forms of consciousness that can be appropriated to the exploitation and appropriation of capacities for social creativity. We contend that the trends we have noted above, are designed explicitly for the task of producing subjectivities willing and excited to develop soft skills and virtual social networks, cultivate an insatiable hunger for virtual experience, and to understand themselves as an infinite set of failed selves available for psychological intervention, correction, and training. To this end, we have created a psycho-fascist society as a giant asylum with all of us as the technicians of social control, self-diagnosing, self-medicating, self-isolating, and virtual-lobotomizing in the pursuit of absolute psychic alienation from a hostile and genocidal system of rule.

Towards an Alternative Psychology

At this point, the question is: Can psychology do something else? Can we develop a liberation psychology forceful enough to deinstitutionalize the global asylum of virtual capitalism? To answer this, we might begin with the definition of the brain that Deleuze and Guattari (2014) offer us in *What is Philosophy*. Arguably, the brain constitutes the central attention of the last century of psychological investment. Here, our behaviors originate, our thoughts emerge, and our emotions are configured. The geography of the physical brain has been mapped and re-mapped from phrenology to neuroscience. While there have been competitors for the attention of psychology from biomedical theories of disease, anthropological and social mappings, and psychoanalytic structures to genetic pre-figurations, we would argue that each of these, at the end of the day, arrives at the brain.

It is notable for our purposes here that Deleuze and Guattari conclude their explication of the philosophical with the brain. Deleuze and Guattari's argument is deeply and profoundly rooted in the psychological frameworks of gestalt, phenomenology, and emerging neuroscience. Their proposal is one in which the

brain eludes its description as a closed organic system. Instead, they suggest that we might read the brain as a site of entanglement for the production of the social preconscious. This preconscious is the set of virtual capacities derived from the ecological entanglements of the emergent self. It engages chaos and distills what Spinoza refers to as the unique capacities of the body to act and the mind to think.

This is what we have referred to earlier as Deleuze and Guattari's concept of desiring production, actualizing the virtual, or the emergent random configurations of life in process as the idiosyncratic subjectification of the social subject. This process lies outside our bifurcated conscious awareness and produces us at all levels throughout the body and its environs. It is precisely this that cyber capitalism seeks to appropriate and that always exceeds the binary capacity of abstract systems of dominance. In this, it is crucial for the cyber capitalist empire that our consciousness remains bifurcated, so that it can perform its acts of psychic savagery behind our backs.

However, suppose we begin to use psychology in an ecologically entangled manner. In that case, we might begin to open sets of living relations that exceed any attempt to wrestle them away from us. Our relations with all things material, including thought, might emerge, if we were to conceptualize the brain and our neurology as a site of connectivity, where our perceptions integrate as points of transit between an infinite system of ecological interconnectivity. To rethink the brain and neurology, we would want to remove the binary distinction between thought and sensation and open up the possibility of the brain as mind and mind as simultaneously affect and thought. That is, the brain as rooted in sensate vibration that travels in multitudinous directions across all dimensions of the living ecology in which we are embedded. Deleuze and Guattari refer to this as the brain-subject becoming "soul or force" (p. 211). In this realm of soul or force, in the sensate domain, a genuinely ecological psychology is proposed. Deleuze and Guattari tell us that, although not every organism has a brain, there is a network of sensations that produces the combination of all species as a collective brain that includes "vegetal tissues in the 'small species'" (p. 212). This field of "chemical affinities and physical causalities" produce resonating chains of force and what they term an "inorganic life of things" (p.212).

We wonder what a psychology would look like that was capable of apprehending and articulating the brain in these kinds of registers. What would be the political implications of a psychology that modeled itself on the brain as a "junction" between those planes of human endeavor that "cast nets across chaos." What if we were to see the field of psychology as a genuinely transdisciplinary set of propositions and practices? Would we be able to find the *becoming other* of psychology as a field of infinitely liberatory transits centered in a radical reconfiguration of the brain, thought, sensation, and experience? Would this be the ground for a politics of psychology that could plunge the abstract codifications of global capital into the immanent sphere of lived materiality?

Common Worlding

While we cannot point to a definitive example of what such a politics would look like, one initiative we find evocative is the Common Worlding collective initiated by Veronica Pacini-Ketchabaw (Taylor and Ketchabaw, 2018). The project draws a transdisciplinary collective of teachers, children, academics, and activists to engage the question of living in common with non-human species and the material world we inhabit. By engaging in collaborative activities with adults, children, and the world we share in common, the project weaves and entangles real-world experiences (i.e., the feel of water, earthworms, ash from a forest fire, mud), encounters with other species (deer and raccoons for example), legacies of anthropogenic environmental impacts, colonial land theft, global inequalities, art, and movement into platforms for early childhood pedagogies. Drawing on feminist proposals of posthumanist physics and biology (Barad, 2003; Haraway, 2003), the collective works to “reassemble worlds by countering the divisive distinction that is often drawn between sociocultural contexts and natural environments. It resists the epistemological division between society and/or culture as distinct from nature and other living things that underpins post-Enlightenment Western thinking” (Taylor and Pacini-Ketchabaw, 2018). In short, the collective entangles science, philosophy, and art in a bricolage of living force that we have articulated above as a form of politics. We would argue that projects such as this move toward opening lines of affect, thought, and expression that may well point towards radically new subjective positions firmly situated in materiality. Transdisciplinary projects like this seem to have suggestive resonances for psychology and a political project.

Psychology Inside Out

At the end of, *What is Philosophy?* Deleuze and Guattari tell us that to produce the becoming other of science, philosophy, and art, each discipline must engage a foundational relationship with the “No that concerns it” (p. 218). Suppose we are to enter into a political engagement with capitalism that creates it as strange to itself. That being so, we must first escape the way that it makes our discipline of psychology so familiar within the orbit of its twenty-first-century rule. To do that, we need a non-psychology that comprehends psychology from the inside out. We must apply the logic of immanent politics to our psychological science, philosophy, and artistic inclinations. Psychology must take its own relative deterritorializations to the absolute and make it pass over the plane of immanence as a movement of the infinite and suppress it as internal limit [so that it] turns back against itself so as to summon a new earth, a new people (Deleuze and Guattari, 2014 p. 99).

Psychology as a politics of immanence is set as a precise point of intersection and entanglement of science, philosophy, and art. As such, it has the virtual possibility of producing each discipline as indiscernible and unavailable to the appropriation and capture by the taxonomic regimes of capitalism. These

counter-intuitive politics do not necessarily charge barricades, overthrow governments, or speak truth to power. Instead, they locate psychology as a politics that sets the ground from which an onto-eco-logical system of rule might emerge that is premised on, what Foucault called the *actual* (Deleuze and Guattari, 2014). We need not be opposed to anything, but instead seek the entangled edges of our non-identity; the becoming other of psychology, psychologists, and, of course, ourselves.

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From the technology of behaviour to surveillance capitalism: Psychology as a means of control in the digital era

Christos Krystallis & Nicole Sarla

Abstract

This paper delves into the transformation of behaviourism into surveillance capitalism and its implications for societal control in the digital age. By tracing the historical roots of behaviourism and its influence on modern psychology, the paper explores how surveillance capitalism leverages behavioural data and technology to manipulate human behaviour for profit. Ethical considerations regarding privacy, autonomy, and the power dynamics at play in this digital landscape are critically examined. Through an interdisciplinary lens that merges psychology and technology, this study illuminates the intricate interplay between subjectivity, power, and societal influence in the contemporary era of surveillance capitalism.

Keywords

technology of behavior, surveillance capitalism, behavioural economics, behaviourism, subjectivity

1. Introduction

Behaviourism arose when psychology struggled to be established as a scientific discipline. Behaviourism was only one among the various branches of psychology that emerged at the field's beginnings.¹ As Danziger explains, the adoption of the concept of behaviour early in the 20th century facilitated the disjunction between the inner and the outer aspects of human action at its most extreme form, "spawning, first, a 'systematic' introspective psychology of consciousness, and then, in an almost immediate reaction, a radical behaviourism that equated action with observable movement." (Danziger, 1997: 145). The idea that psychology is the science of behaviour enabled a more positivistic vision of

¹ Various approaches arose within the foundation of psychology (psychoanalysis, Gestalt psychology, systemic theory, cognitive psychology, etc.). Our focus on behaviourism derives from its relevance to behavioural economics and surveillance capitalism in the digital era and the application of its theoretical implications on the use of psychology as means of control.

psychology as a natural science, distancing itself from –what was considered to be– an occult character of inner experience. Behaviourism’s main focus was on *observable* behaviour: whether it was because of the inaccessibility of mental phenomena (methodological behaviourism) or because of the reduction of all mental phenomena to observable behaviour (radical behaviourism) (Hergehnahn, 2009). More importantly, as Watson (1913), who popularised the theory of behaviourism, proclaimed, its goal –as a branch of natural science– was the prediction and control of behaviour. This was no incident; behaviourism and neobehaviourism –until the advent of its alleged rival, cognitive psychology– attempted to make sense of why people behave the way they do by postulating that behaviour can be analyzed, predicted, and controlled by understanding the organism’s current structure and the control of the environment over it (radical environmentalism). This was the basic concept that behaviourism bequeathed not only to psychology but to the intellectual background of the 20th century.

The digital transformation of this century irreversibly transformed the private and social life of the individual. Many digital technologies in one way or another are based on some type of psychological knowledge. Whether it is the understanding of the mind in order to build an intelligent agent or the analysis of the behaviour of the platform’s user in order to create a profile for prediction and control of behaviour. What is of most importance in all of these cases is the cooperation between technological advancements and psychological approaches and the multiple consequences of such a cooperation (epistemological, social, psychological, etc.). In this respect, the question arises concerning the specification of the type of psychological knowledge applied in the aforementioned cooperation.

One distinctive example of a relevant analysis is Zuboff’s *The Age of Surveillance Capitalism*, where the emergence of surveillance capitalism and the related multilevel transformation are closely examined. In this argument the role of behaviourism in the function of the Artificial Intelligence (AI) systems used by the platform becomes central. Different theories conceptualizing cognition and intelligence have influenced the development of AI. Symbolicism focuses on the hypothesis that a physical symbol system has the necessary means to generate/exhibit general intelligent action (Shi, 2011: 10); connectionism –as part of cognitive science– focuses on parallel processing of sub-symbols and its models are based on a neurophysiological approach of the brain (Medler, 1998); behaviourism focuses on intelligence without representation, without reasoning and promotes the idea “that intelligence is determined by the dynamics of interaction with the world.” (Shi, 2011: 11). In researching the relationship between science and society, specifically when trying to clarify the mechanisms that work beneath the surface and enable the use of science –in this case, psychology– as means of control in the digital era, one important concept comes to the foreground: *subjectivity*. Based on the aforementioned, the focus on behaviourism derives from the interest in defining what constitutes the specific interaction of the intelligent agent (whether it is a human or a machine) with the world. More specifically, within the foundation of behaviourism, a passive nature is attributed to the subject and, consequently, a specific conceptualization of

subjectivity by behaviourism is established.

Another aspect of this conceptualization concerns the use of the notion of the *individual*. The relationship between environment-society and the individual-subject appears to be external. Within the theoretical framework of psychology, two different and contradictory approaches to this relationship can be found: either the environment-society defines the subject's inner life (radical behaviourism), or the individual is considered to be structurally detached from their environment, with the potential of willingly "entering" social environment (individualistic psychological approaches). The idea of the disjunction of the environment-society and individual-subject is highly problematic mainly for two reasons. Firstly, the notion of the individual is historically transformed, acquiring its detached character with the separation of the private and the social sphere, which separation reflects specific social relations (see Dafermos, 2012); secondly, an individualistic conceptualization of the subject misses out on the structurally significant part of social environment on human psychological (and not only) development. As Marx writes in his 6th thesis on Feuerbach "[...] the human essence is no abstraction inherent in each single individual. In its reality it is the ensemble of the social relations" (Marx, 1845). More than thirty years before the foundation of the first experimental psychological laboratory that studied conscious subjective experience, Marx identified the simplest, most important, and at the same time most difficult idea that psychology would encounter since its birth: the fact that the subject is defined within social relations.

The idea that the world gives birth to subjectivity and therefore subjective experience has been an issue that many psychological theories attempted to integrate one way or another and to some degree. To name some examples, in Lacanian psychoanalysis "The subject is not simply determined by the structure. To become a subject, one must take a position in relation to the desire of the Other" (Homer, 2005: 74). At the same time, systemic approach emerged as a critique to psychoanalytic practice and transcended what was considered to be an individual-centered approach and the boundaries of the individual mind by examining some phenomenon or appearance "within the context of all completed circuits which are relevant to it" (Bateson, 1971: 244). However a view that transcends the individual-society division in psychology requires more than transcending the boundaries of the individual. It requires a different perspective on the process and the content of internalization by the subject as a social being, as well as its activity as a social being. This perspective has been systematically undermined by behaviourism since conceptualizing the subject as a social being transcends its total determination and control by the environment; it refers to the interaction between subjectivity and the social environment. Aspects of this undermining can be traced also to behavioural economics and surveillance capitalism where the focus turns to specific characteristics of the subject, those that can be utilised in specific social and economic processes.

In this paper, we examine the question of how psychology can be used as a means of control in the digital era by investigating the conjunction between behaviourism, behavioural economics, and surveillance capitalism, all of which

share a behaviouristic background as well as a relation to technological advancements related to prediction and control of behaviour. In this respect, the notion of subjectivity emerges, not as a notion thematised by these approaches. On the contrary, we argue that behaviourism, behavioural economics, and surveillance capitalism, all three converge on the *abolition of subjectivity*. When investigating this process, we focus on the status of subjectivity in the aforementioned approaches: how it is conceptualised, which of its aspects are set aside, as well as the consequences of this conceptualization. The latter constitutes a rejection of those aspects of the human being that refer to will, intentionality, the uniqueness of subjective experience, as well as the social character of the process of internalization. Discussing different theories of the production of subjectivity is beyond the scope of this paper. Instead, for the examination of psychology as a means of control in the digital era we find it very useful to highlight conceptualizations of subjectivity as they appear in the most prominent analyses related to the topic. This enables outlining the characteristics of psychology that these analyses exclude from the examination, which therefore helps us outline a conceptualization of the subject of politics that needs to be preserved when considering the use of psychology as a means of control.

Based on the aforementioned in this paper, we will briefly present the emergence of behaviourism in psychology and Skinner's vision underlying the establishment of the science of behaviour as well as the appearance (or lack) of the concept of the subject. Next, we will examine the emergence of behavioural economics and highlight convergencies and divergencies between behaviourism, behavioural economics, and cognitive psychology in order to examine the role of subjectivity in these approaches. In the last section, we examine Zuboff's analysis of surveillance capitalism and the economics of the different platforms in order to outline the process of applying behaviourism –an incidentally technocratic psychological approach– as a means of control in the prevailing digital era.

2. From behaviourism to cognitive psychology

2.1 The historical transitions in psychology

Behaviourism emerged as an alternative to the dispute between structural and functional psychology (see for example Hergenhahn, 2009, Ch. 9, 11-12), highlighting the quagmire into which psychology had sunk. John Watson (1878-1958) was the introducer of behaviourism in North America; in his famous article *Psychology as a behaviorist views it* (1913) he attributed psychology's dead-ends to the "erroneous" research method that psychology had adopted –i.e. introspection– and its also "erroneous" subject matter –i.e. consciousness. He proposed a solution based on the principles of behaviourism which were founded within the context of adopting experiment as a methodology and observable behaviour as the subject matter of psychology, aiming to *control* and *predict* behaviour (Watson, 1913). Behaviourism's programme was based on the idea

that both the control and the prediction of behaviour were founded on determining the laws that govern the stimulus-response (S-R) relationship. The rejection of consciousness as the subject matter of psychology was associated with the idea that consciousness drives or causes behaviour. The main premise of behaviourism lies in the conception that it is learning that is critical for the emergence of behaviour and behaviourism was founded on the concept of “classical conditioning” which refers to learning as a process of events correlated based on the laws of associationism. In that way, the “psychology of consciousness” became the “psychology of stimulus-response”.

Burrhus F. Skinner (1904-1990) expanded behaviourism with his theory of operant conditioning. Skinner describes succinctly the idea of operant conditioning of behaviour: “When a bit of behaviour has the kind of consequence called reinforcing, it is more likely to occur again” and, subsequently, he distinguishes between positive and negative reinforcing (Skinner, 1974: 46). As we shall see, Skinner focuses on positive reinforcement for the modification on behaviour. What is most important is that for Skinner explaining behaviour in terms of operant conditioning is not simply described within the context of the relationship between stimulus, response, and the reinforcement that took place for the response (behaviour) to appear. For Skinner the process of reinforcement is not associated with the feeling of good; it is the *survival value* of the reinforcement that’s of most importance in Skinner’s behavioural theory. The prominent role of evolutionary theory, instead of the psychological aspect of subjective experience for explaining behaviour, can be discerned in the following passage: “The behavior occurs because appropriate mechanisms have been selected in the course of evolution. The feelings are merely collateral products of the conditions responsible for the behavior” (Skinner, 1974: 47).

What becomes clear is the mechanistic approach to which behaviourism yields. Within this mechanistic approach, the subject is the sum of responses to external stimuli; the appearance of behaviour is the only important concept for the study of behaviourism –although Skinner would oppose the concept of *concept* since it implies the existence of an inner structure that processes the concept itself. This becomes clear when Skinner discusses motives as something we infer from the behaviour, a mentalistic concept that we don’t know exists since all we are aware of is that a person “behaves energetically” (Skinner, 1974: 51). It is this emphasis on observable behaviour, and subsequently the rejection of any inner structure that leads behaviourism, on the one hand to naive empiricism and on the other to the promotion of a passive nature of human beings. To be exact, by focusing only on the mechanisms selected in the course of evolution and relating them to the concept of reinforcement, as well as by focusing on the behaviour, leaving aside subjective experience, behaviourism equips its theoretical framework with a passive organism that relates with its environment only to absorb and react.

Cognitive psychology is usually viewed as contradictory to behaviourism since it moved from the extraneous S-R relation to the intrinsic stimulus–stimulus (S-S) relation, which was grounded on the investigation of mental processes previously rejected by behaviourism. This is based on the idea that the

“cognitive revolution” was so radical that it overthrew behaviourism, a claim rejected by some historians who describe cognitive psychology more as sophisticated behaviourism (Leahey, 1992), rather than a contradictory theory to it. By the 1960s, after the “cognitive revolution”, the formation of cognitive psychology led to accomplishing what psychology had started the previous century: psychology was always, in a sense, cognitive; it was only behaviourism that distanced psychology from mental life. But, at the same time, behaviourism developed a conceptual apparatus that would follow psychology for a long time.

The term “cognitive psychology” was coined by Ulric Neisser (1928-2012) in his book *Cognitive Psychology* (1967). As Hyman states in his introduction to Neisser’s book, “the cognitive movement was a scientific revolution and Cognitive Psychology became the rallying cry for the cognitive revolution.” (Hyman, 2014: xv) Neisser integrated recent work concerning cognition which “refers to all the processes by which the sensory input is transformed, reduced, elaborated, stored, recovered, and used” regardless of the presence or absence of the stimulus (Neisser, 2014: 4). The concept of information processing was the foundation for this development.

If we tried to summarise in just one sentence behaviourism’s critique of cognitive science and any kind of scientific theory related to it, we would focus on the concept of *subjectivity*. Behaviourism was based on the emphasis on the role of the environment and on discovering the rules that govern the S-R relationship through the concept of operant conditioning by rejecting any other level between stimulus and response. Psychology of consciousness, which preceded behaviourism, reserved a unique place for subjectivity by studying the phenomena and the contents of consciousness (see for example the work of Wilhelm Wundt (1879-1920) and William James (1842-1910), two of the most prominent psychologists who studied consciousness: James, 1950; Wundt, 1897). Although the psychology of consciousness didn’t focus on the formation of a theory of subjectivity, by retaining consciousness as its subject matter and introspection as its method, it preserved a place for subjectivity as a level of inquiry evaluated as important and scientific. Behaviourism’s attempt to make psychology an objective science, minimizing the importance of subjective experience was one of the many aspects of the abolition of subjectivity. Interestingly, behaviourism’s programme, though very influential, didn’t manage to supersede the emphasis on a level of subjectivity in psychological inquiry. Cognitive psychology emerged as a revisit to this subjectivity by focusing on the level of processing of information (see Lachman, Lachman & Butterfield, 1979).

Although cognitive psychology didn’t reject the subjective level of experience, questions arise concerning the narrow, dualistic, fragmented understanding of consciousness that had already been established before its disappearance and the way that this understanding influenced, limited, or liberated the examination of consciousness later on. As we shall see, this ambiguity also applies to behavioural economics since there exists a level of mental life, a type of processing, but the focus on response –and most importantly the beneficial behaviour and ophelimity– leaves aside subjective experience itself.

Though Skinner advanced the study of behaviour, we won't go beyond the line by saying that what he was aiming for was more than just establishing scientific psychology and understanding behaviour for the sake of scientific knowledge. His most aspiring goal was to transform humanity and society based on his diagnosis of what's wrong with it and his pessimism about where human beings are driving themselves. This is why beyond conditioning one of the most important ideas that Skinner launched was that of the *technology of behaviour*; for that technology of behaviour to be accomplished, subjectivity needed to be abolished.

But before we go further into this, it is important to detect and comprehend the underlying idea of Skinner's thought concerning humanity, society, and what a solution would look like in his view. In what follows we will describe Skinner's utopia for the perfect programmable behaviour which is further contextualised by his idea of the technology of behaviour. This will set the scene for the examination of behavioural economics and their relation to behaviourism and cognitive psychology, from which conclusions are drawn concerning their sui generis interrelation.

2.2 Skinner's utopia

The American philosopher David Thoreau (1817-1862) is widely known for his book *On the duty of civil disobedience* (1849), where he expressed, perhaps for the first time, his belief that citizens should not entrust the government or the state with the responsibility of organizing their daily lives. In this way, their conscience is dulled. A few years later, Thoreau wrote a short story entitled *Walden* (1854). There we find the following paragraph:

If there is not a new man, how can the new clothes be made to fit? If you have any enterprise before you, try it in your old clothes. All men want, not something to do with, but something to do, or rather something to be. Perhaps we should never procure a new suit, however ragged or dirty the old, until we have so conducted, so enterprised or sailed in some way, that we feel like new men in the old, and that to retain it would be like keeping new wine in old bottles. Our moulting season, like that of the fowls, must be a crisis in our lives. The loon retires to solitary ponds to spend it. Thus also the snake casts its slough, and the caterpillar its wormy coat, by an internal industry and expansion; for clothes are but our outmost cuticle and mortal coil. Otherwise we shall be found sailing under false colors, and be inevitably cashiered at last by our own opinion, as well as that of mankind. (Thoreau, 1995)

To write the above, Thoreau distanced himself from civilization to be close to (his) nature. There what is not necessary disappears and people can be frugal but with such harmony and precision that all their needs and desires are met. Issues such as interest in new clothes would be secondary as people could easily find something to be without worrying about consumption.

On the other hand, we would be willing to let Thoreau and his concept of

natural life and life in nature be forgotten in the distant 19th century. Paradoxically, however, almost a century after the publication of *Walden*, B.F. Skinner would write his utopia and call it *Walden Two* (1948). Skinner identifies in Thoreau's book a common vision: the vision of a fully automated society regulated by the physical rules of the human's natural state. Life in the natural state is perfectly functional and programmed; what to the common mind seems like a compulsion, for Skinner is absolute freedom.

Let us take a look at the way Skinner answers the question of dress and aesthetic diligence in open conversation with Thoreau's *Walden*:

But isn't dressing up precisely the sort of unnecessary trouble that a Utopia should dispense with?" said Castle. [...] "It really isn't so much trouble," said Mrs. Meyerson. "Our dress isn't severe; it's just enough to meet current standards." "And we have time for trouble," said Frazier. "You're thinking of dressing in the usual rush, after driving home from a late appointment at the office through rush-hour traffic to reach a dinner party in time for cocktails. None of that here, you see. We have plenty of time for everything. We like a break between the active part of the day and the quieter social hours at dinner and in the evening. A bath and a change are an important point in the day's schedule. They are psychologically refreshing. (Skinner, 2005: 30- 31)

Unlike Thoreau, Skinner identifies the functionality of the change of clothes and integrates it organically into the programming of society. Clothing rotation is psychologically refreshing and enhances the sense of satisfaction that community members derive from their daily activities. People are looking for something to be.

Zuboff writes very characteristically when commenting on Skinner's utopia:

Skinner's utopia was meant to illustrate the possibility of a successful social order that transcends the use of force and rejects the need to dominate human souls. The *Walden Two* community equally disdains the practices of democratic politics and representative government. Its laws are derived from a science of human behavior, specifically Skinner's own radical behaviorism, founded on the physicist's ideal of the Other-One. His utopia was a vehicle for other ambitions as well, intended to illustrate the behavioral solutions that are essential for improvement in every domain of modern life: the nuclear threat, pollution, population control, urban growth, economic equality, crime, education, health care, the development of the individual, effective leisure. It aimed to cultivate "the good life," for which all the ideals of a liberal society—freedom, autonomy, privacy, a people's right to self-rule—must be forfeit. (Zuboff, 2019: 374)

In the 1976 introduction, Skinner will reveal something else –something extremely important. *Walden Two* is not just a utopian short story. It is a political utopia in conversation with one of the greatest economists of the 19th century. Skinner is in conversation with Thomas Robert Malthus (1766-1834), a fact made explicit by a brief mention of Malthus' name very early on, at the beginning of his introduction and developed emphatically thereafter:

The first is from Henry David Thoreau's *Walden*: by reducing the amount of goods we consume, we can reduce the amount of time we spend in unpleasant labor. The second appears to assert just the opposite: we must all consume as much as possible so that everyone can have a job. I submit that the first is more reasonable, even though the second is defended by many people today. Indeed, it might be argued that if America were to convert to a network of small communities, our economy would be wrecked. But something is wrong when it is the system that must be saved rather than the way of life that the system is supposed to serve. (Skinner, 2005: xiv)

The utopia of a behaviourally programmed society is a political programme toward a cultural change that responds to the problems that Malthus warned society about in the early 19th century (Malthus, 2015). The behaviourally programmed society is a proposal for birth control, for the regulation of the population's behaviour, for the regulation of consumption to the rates of production. In other words it is a remedy for every crisis of the capitalist mode of production.

2.3 The technology of behaviour

Skinner presents the technology of behaviour as a postulate that arises from the contemporary development of society. For Skinner, the idea of a technology of behaviour comes as a necessary development for the survival of the culture and the possibility of solving the difficult problems it deals with:

[...] beyond the accomplishments of the individual, we must take into account where the culture as a whole is going and just to be happy, just to feel free, just to feel worthy will not deal with all of the problems that face us. Beyond freedom and dignity lies the future and that is what we must take into account we must make sure that human behavior will be so designed that will maximize our chances to solving our problems and leaving a decent world to the people who follow us. (Skinner, 1971)

In Skinner's thought –that coincides with the thought of the behavioural economists– the development of hardcore Science is bound to their political proclamation. This means that the development of an empirical science founded on hardcore empirical data was a presupposition for the political proclamation of the two approaches.

Skinner's discussion of the technology of behaviour is related to the diagnosis of the terrible situation that humanity is headed: "In short, we need to make vast changes in human behaviour, and we cannot make them with the help of nothing more than physics or biology, no matter how hard we try" (Skinner, 1971: 10). Skinner creates a special place for psychology to determine the future of humanity: psychology as a behavioural science can lead the way to envisage the problems of society that are being deteriorated by political choices. Skinner attacks any psychology that is not a psychology of behaviour for muddying the

water and delaying the development of a truly scientific psychology through which the technology of behaviour will be possible.

Two characteristics are fundamental for the technology of behaviour: *environment* and *control*. One of behaviourism's main contributions to psychological knowledge is the role of the environment in human development and how it puts human-environment interaction in the spotlight. Radical environmentalism supports the idea that human behaviour is caused by environmental experiences. Radical environmentalism combined with radical behaviourism promotes the idea that every experience is as experienced, leaving aside any mentalistic concept, and denying any inner experience as such since all mental, inner experiences are physical and bodily ones. The interrelation of control and environment come together to advance psychological knowledge since "our increasing knowledge of the control exerted by the environment makes it possible to examine the effect of the world within the skin and the nature of self-knowledge" (Skinner, 1974: 17). It's not only that environment causes behaviour, but also that the fact that behaviour can be controlled provides a precedent for the manipulation of the environment for behaviour to be controlled.

For Skinner, the emphasis on the environment is intertwined with the foundations of scientific psychology. By centering examination on the environment, Skinner lays the groundwork for scientific psychology to study the physical systems and conditions under which the human species evolved, as well as the contemporary conditions in which humans exist (Skinner, 1971). This allowed the connection between behaviourism and evolutionary theory. One of the most important characteristics of the role of environment in behaviourism is that "the environment not only prods or lashes, it selects. Its role is similar to that in natural selection" (Skinner, 1971: 24).

This is where control comes into the foreground. If every psychological phenomenon can be reduced to behaviour, and the environment plays a crucial role in the formation and emergence of behaviour, it follows that manipulating the environment can lead to desired behavioural outcomes. This is the foundation of the technology of behaviour: the engineering of even more control of the environment to control and predict behaviour. This is the point where Skinner's theoretical edifice meets Watson's proclamation of behaviourism.

For Skinner, the engineering of control is deeply related to the essence of the technology of behaviour serving the survival of culture. The purpose of the structure is to create a spot for applying positive reinforcement to the modification of behaviour for the benefit of society. This is why, according to his view, control is desirable, and more of it is needed. As he explains:

What is needed is more control, not less, and this is itself an engineering problem of the first importance. The good of a culture cannot function as the source of genuine reinforcers for the individual, and the reinforcers contrived by cultures to induce their members to work for their survival are often in conflict with personal reinforcers. (Skinner, 1971: 173)

Since Skinner has identified the great danger of the degeneration of the culture

and society and the solution of technology of behaviour, his scheme serves the goal with which he started. But what is often omitted is the conservative character of his structure –both politically and epistemologically. His tendency towards conservatism interestingly appears when he examines the purpose of the evolution of the culture and the subject's role in it:

A culture which for any reason induces its members to work for its survival is more likely to survive. It is a matter of the good of the culture, not of the individual. Explicit design promotes that good by accelerating the evolutionary process, and since a science and a technology of behavior make for better design, they are important 'mutations' in the evolution of a culture. If there is any purpose or direction in the evolution of a culture, it has to do with bringing people under the control of more and more of the consequences of their behavior. (Skinner, 1971: 142)

Skinner's use of the technology of behaviour is applied towards the preservation of culture as it is, without any deep and essential modifications, apart from integrating the benefit of others into the control of behaviour. Skinner is unable to comprehend the contradictions he observes in society, leaving him with a technology of behaviour that should avoid these contradictions for the preservation of culture and society fundamentally as it is, with minor modifications, which constitutes the conservative character of behaviourism.

When we assume that behaviour is solely controlled by the environment, the next logical question is how to exercise control humanely and determine the optimal behaviours to reinforce. This is where Skinner left and from where behavioural economics continued. But the fault lies in accepting the first premise: *behaviour is controlled by the environment*. Skinner's radical environmentalism rejects every inner structure (conscious or unconscious) as non-existent and everything is defined by external contingent stimuli. On this ground, there is nothing worthwhile in the inner structure that can define behaviour, psyche, mental functions, etc. This is related to the abolition of subjectivity, which in turn constitutes a specific type of subjectivity. The subject is then conceptualised by behaviourism as passive since its main characteristic is that it can be molded according to one's desires and there is nothing within the subjectivity's structure able to resist this manipulation.

In a way, subjectivity –as a psychological level related to will, consciousness, motives, etc., and not simply observable behaviour– could operate as an obstacle to the application of the technology of behaviour and the entirety of the programme of behaviourism. This becomes more explicit in the attempt to apply behaviourism beyond the field of psychology, in economics.

3. The birth of behavioural economics

3.1 A new foundation for economic science

Daniel Kahneman (born in 1934) became the first psychologist to be awarded the

Nobel Prize for Economic Science in 2002. Fifteen years later, Richard Thaler (born in 1945), Kahneman's colleague and co-inventor of the field of Behavioural Economics, will also receive the Nobel Prize. So it seems that the 21st century finds psychologists in a privileged position of interlocutor with a seemingly alien scientific field to them: economics.

The relationship between economics and psychology, although it extends over time and can be traced back to Adam Smith's work, *The theory of moral sentiment* (1759), does not acquire a systematic relationship until the emergence of a new field of research: behavioural economics.² Richard Thaler in his book *Misbehaving: The making of behavioral economics* (2016) accurately presents the history of the organised meeting of the two disciplines in the 1980s in the USA.

Despite years of processes and the deep common philosophical horizon of the two disciplines, one could claim that the birth of behavioural economics occurred at the moment when Richard Thaler met Hal Varian –the later proponent of Google economics– and the already famous Robert Stiglitz, who invited them to participate in the founding of a new journal for economic theory, the *Journal of Economic Perspectives*. The first issue of the journal in 1987 features a column with the curious title *Anomalies* and the signature of Richard Thaler. Thaler begins his article with a reference to the following passage, which he attributes to Thomas Kuhn: "Discovery commences with the awareness of anomaly, i.e., with the recognition that nature has somehow violated the paradigm-induced expectations that govern normal science" (Thaler, 2015: 171). In this way, he established a direct association with the revolutionary aspect of Kuhn's work.

The reference to Kuhn, although it sounds paradoxical, should not impress us. Kuhn was particularly popular as his book, *The structure of scientific revolutions* (1962), was and still is of interest to researchers in all scientific fields. Thaler, however, had more incentives for a reference to Kuhn. He believed that the foundations of economics were not stable and that a small scientific revolution, a Copernican turn, was needed for economics to achieve a stable foundation –which is very similar to behaviourism's diagnosis of the situation in psychology, although Kuhn's work was not available at the time. The reference to Kuhn was thus a declaration that neoclassical economics had collapsed: the theory that underpinned that the economic actors can decide rationally and that attempted to organise economic science within the foundation of the anthropological type of Homo Economicus had nothing to say for the economic actors of the time and was more of an impediment for economics. Thaler frankly describes his ambition:

My goal was much more modest: just get a few more papers published and begin to establish the case that adding some psychology to economics was an activity

² Although there are many essential differences between Smith's political economy and behavioural economics, one of the most prominent ones, which also concerns epistemological issues, is the mixed methodology that Smith adopts, combining deductive and inductive reasoning, history and theoretical analysis to develop his, admittedly, individualistic theory of economic development (Fine & Mylonakis, 2009) contrary to the reductionistic approach of behavioural economics.

worth pursuing. But I had certainly read Kuhn's path-breaking book *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions*, and had wondering whether anything like a paradigm shift could ever be possible in economics. (Thaler, 2015: 168)

The journey that culminated in the two Nobel Prizes of the 21st century began with the launch of a successful column in a new magazine in 1987. More importantly, it begins with the establishment of a community of economists who begin to negotiate economics while rejecting the rational choice theory of economic actors. But if Homo Economicus is not the starting point, what can be the foundation of a new economic science?

3.2 From the normative to the descriptive theory of decision

Daniel Kahneman in his book *Think, Fast and Slow* (2011) explains in detail the rupture he attempts to make in the foundations of economics. He has already realised that the term *utility*, which economics has included from its very birth, needs to be formulated more clearly. He elaborates with an example:

My fascination with the possible discrepancies between experienced utility and decision utility goes back a long way. While Amos and I were still working on prospect theory, I formulated a puzzle, which went like this: imagine an individual who receives one painful injection every day. There is no adaptation; the pain is the same day to day. Will people attach the same value to reducing the number of planned injections from 20 to 18 as from 6 to 4? Is there any justification for a distinction? I did not collect data, because the outcome was evident. You can verify for yourself that you would pay more to reduce the number of injections by a third (from 6 to 4) than by one tenth (from 20 to 18). The decision utility of avoiding two injections is higher in the first case than in the second, and everyone will pay more for the first reduction than for the second. But this difference is absurd. (Kahneman, 2011: 418)

Based on the aforementioned, Kahneman argues that we should refer to utilitarianism in two different forms: in terms of experience and in terms of decision. He goes further to explain that these two forms of utilitarianism arise as our thinking is divided into two systems:

System 1 operates automatically and quickly, with little or no effort and no sense of voluntary control.

System 2 allocates attention to the effortful mental activities that demand it, including complex computations. The operations of System 2 are often associated with the subjective experience of agency, choice, and concentration. (Kahneman, 2011: 22)

So if Economic Beings have a powerful System 2 that can regulate every human reflex, Real Beings (us) have a lazy controller System 2, which most of the time fails to respond to the complexity of System 1. Kahneman's (and Thaler's) project is to attempt to ground economic science on the actual behaviour of real

people. In a way, the entirety of the project of behavioural economics relies on the transition from the *ideal economic beings* to the *real human beings* that correspond with the economic actors.

For Thaler, this transformation constitutes a move from a normative to a descriptive theory of human behaviour. The great opponent in this process was the great mathematician John von Neumann (1903-1957), who in his book *Theory of Games and Economic Behavior* (1944), formulates the theory of expected utility. Thaler describes von Neumann's project as follows:

The way that von Neumann and Morgenstern created the theory was to begin by writing down a series of axioms of rational choice. They then derived how someone who wanted to follow these axioms would behave. The axioms are mostly uncontroversial notions such as transitivity, a technical term that says if you prefer A over B and B over C then you must prefer A over C. Remarkably, von Neumann and Morgenstern proved that if you want to satisfy these axioms (and you do), then you must make decisions according to their theory. The argument is completely convincing. If I had an important decision to make—whether to refinance my mortgage or invest in a new business—I would aim to make the decision in accordance with expected utility theory, just as I would use the Pythagorean theorem to estimate the altitude of our railroad triangle. Expected utility is the right way to make decisions. (Thaler, 2015: 29)

In contrast to this approach, Thaler proposes building a descriptive theory for human behaviour. Most people know what the Pythagorean Theorem is, yet they do not perform their daily necessary calculations based on it. Similarly, although most people, if they had the time, energy, and patience to calculate, would weigh their choices better, they still make decisions given their circumstances and their strengths. The mission of behavioural economics is therefore to describe the actual decision-making process of real people and draw up a theory based on it.

Therefore, they do not start from an axiomatic conception of how people decide—how we decide—but start from an experimental project that attempts to study how people negotiate their daily dilemmas through interviews and empirical research. In doing so, they find that human behaviour is pervaded by patterns that overturn attempts to interpret it according to the principles of expected utility theory.

3.3 Behaviourism, behavioural economics, and the bridge with surveillance capitalism

Both Skinner's behaviourism and behavioural economics set new foundations for the disciplines they address. The new foundation of radical behaviourism is characterised by the absolute rejection of any internal structure and the absolute identification of behaviour with the situation that causes its appearance, which can be traced back to the contingent reinforcements from the external environment. The new foundation of economic thought is characterised by an

emphasis on empirical studies to see real people, within which a conceptualization of decision-making arises.

Skinner's rejection of any psychological inner structure aligns with his suggestion that freedom and dignity constitute impediments to the development of a technology of behaviour. The special position of scientific psychology once again came to the foreground. The abolishment of prescientific terminology associated with freedom and dignity will guarantee not only the development of a scientific psychology (i.e. psychology as a science of behaviour), but it will also guarantee the development of a technology of behaviour, the endgame of behaviourism. As he frankly stated, the technology of behaviour:

[...] will not solve our problems, however, until it replaces traditional prescientific views, and these are strongly entrenched. Freedom and dignity illustrate the difficulty. They are the possessions of the autonomous man of traditional theory, and they are essential to practices in which a person is held responsible for his conduct and given credit for his achievements. A scientific analysis shifts both the responsibility and the achievement to the environment. (Skinner, 1971: 30)

Skinner fully undermines and downgrades any sort of inner structure –the psyche, the consciousness, and its contents– as well as any sort of value system related to the behaviour exhibited by human beings. For Skinner, the traditional theory about human beings –i.e. the subject of modernity– is deeply flawed when attributing motives and responsibility to the subject, since the subject is only the outcome of its environment.

The same can be discussed for the understatement of System 2 thinking by Kahneman since System 2 is characterised as a “lazy controller.” Following Kahneman's mode of writing, the best way to describe his degradation of System 2 is by presenting an empirical study. Kahneman (2011) presents a study where judges were reviewing applications for parole and the rate of acceptance and rejection of the applications was correlated with the food breaks of the judges, concluding that the approval rate was higher when the judge was reviewing the application at a time closer to the previous break. The presentation and interpretation of the findings suggest that the judges' decisions are correlated to their biological needs, leaving aside any value system within which behaviour arises.

The same idea, adjusted to the assessment of surveillance capitalism, is discussed by Zuboff when referring to *instrumentarian power*. Instrumentarian power is one of the two powers (the other being totalitarian power), which is associated with the modification of behaviour exhibited within digital economies. The main characteristic of instrumentarian power, which is in a way interrelated with the views of Skinner and behavioural economists, is how the essence of humanity, personality, and every aspect of a person's identity is indifferent to its function. As she lively describes:

Instrumentarian power has no interest in our souls or any principle to instruct. There is no training or transformation for spiritual salvation, no ideology against which to judge our actions. [...] It has no appetite for our grief, pain, or terror,

although it eagerly welcomes the behavioral surplus that leaches from our anguish. It is profoundly and infinitely indifferent to our meanings and motives. Trained on measurable action, it only cares that whatever we do is accessible to its ever-evolving operations of rendition, calculation, modification, monetization, and control. (Zuboff, 2019: 360)

Behaviourism, behavioural economics, and surveillance capitalism all meet at the point where subjectivity diminishes. More specifically, their meeting point is where subjectivity's most significant characteristics –from thinking and morality to meanings and motives– can be set aside since they are assessed as insignificant. This movement, therefore, sets the ground for other characteristics to emerge as important: observable behaviour (behaviourism), automatic and quick operation (behavioural economics), and behavioural surplus (surveillance capitalism). It clearly appears what all three views have in common: they focus on a level of subjectivity that coincides with what's most easily to influence and modify and what can easily be quantified and predicted.

If we follow Sotiropoulos, Milios, and Lapatsioras statements in their book *A Political Economy of Contemporary Capitalism and its Crisis (2013)*, we will understand that quantified and predictable behaviour is the only aspect of subjectivity that can be conceived from the standpoint of capital. So, the production of that type of subjectivity is the production of a low-risk behaviour for the reproduction of capital. On the contrary, a subjectivity grounded on its needs and desires is a high-risk subjectivity with high-risk behaviours. Behaviourism, behavioural economics, and surveillance capitalism diminish the essence of subjectivity, and with it, they diminish the want and desire in order to let beneficial behaviour arise as a low-risk behaviour.

3.4 What do we learn about psychology from behavioural economics?

Cognitive psychology could be seen as more relevant to behavioural economics since both reserve a role for mental activity, although behavioural economics present an idea of mental life –a concept highly rejected by behaviourism– only to influence it in a specific manner. In Kahneman's conceptualization of System 1 and System 2, we discern the convergence between behaviourism and cognitive psychology. System 1 can be associated with behaviourism's idea of the automatic process of S-R, since it “operates automatically and quickly, with little or no effort and no sense of voluntary control” and System 2 can be associated with cognitive psychology since it refers to a mechanism that deals with mental activities that require a specific amount of effort and computations and its operations are “associated with the subjective experience of agency, choice, and concentration” (Kahneman, 2011: 22). Behavioural economics may describe a distorted “wholeness” of human beings by integrating automatic and volitional functions; but it is highly focused on the part that can be more easily influenced.

But how could cognitive psychology proclaim to be a revolution contrary to behaviourism if their convergence is so easily applied to another discipline that

studies human behaviour?³ This could be elaborated by taking into consideration one important aspect of the history of psychology and another one concerning the goal of behavioural economics. Firstly, cognitive psychology emerged in order to deal with the inadequacy of neobehaviourism in examining specific psychological phenomena (Greenwood, 2009: 504-513). Even though it turned the lens inside the mind and the brain where mental phenomena appear, it didn't manage to overcome the mechanistic approach facilitated by behaviourism, which led many prominent figures of the cognitive revolution to criticise the course of its programme (Bruner, 1990; Chomsky, 2012; Neisser, 1976). Secondly, behavioural economics focuses on two main concepts: *ophelimity* and *beneficial behaviour*.⁴ It distinguishes between ophelimity and desirability in order to clarify and preserve the idea that what is wanted is not necessarily beneficial. In that way, it is not rational choices that should direct behaviour at the cognitive level. On the contrary, it is the maneuvering of System 1 –which works automatically– that initiates the modification of behaviour.

But the existence of a level of mental activity as proclaimed by behavioural economics when mentioning System 2 does not suffice to establish subjectivity, subjective experience, and an active role of the organism. Based on the aforementioned the advances in cognitive psychology did not leave their mark on behavioural economics, despite its revolutionary character. Contrarily, Skinner's critique of cognitive psychology and its focus on mental life was reserved and further established by behavioural economics. Skinner's rejection of even this susceptible to influence level of subjectivity regarding behavioural economics is described by him as follows:

To the extent that economic theory is concerned with what people *say* they will do, SEU [subjective expected utility] theory may be adequate, but a behavioral scientist (and, one would suppose, an entrepreneur) must be concerned with what they actually do. People most often do those things which have been most abundantly reinforced, without making subjective estimates of the probabilities of reinforcement; and the reinforcers are real, not expected. (Skinner, 1985: 296)

At the crossroads of behaviourism, cognitive psychology, and behavioural economics, what we see is the convergence of a theory that abolishes or sabotages the examination of subjectivity. At the core of this theory, we find the reinforcement of behavioural modification based on a superior understanding of rationality. More importantly, this understanding of rationality is not embedded in the subject, but it is implemented from above: it is *the science of behaviour that can model beneficial behaviour* for the benefit of an abstract, rationally modeled society. The neutrality that follows the diminishment of subjectivity sets the ground for infinite opportunities to nudge human beings toward an always

³ This question can also be applied to the cognitive-behavioural therapy, but such an examination requires a deeper and at the same time wider presentation of the history of psychology which exceeds the aims of this paper.

⁴ The theorists of behavioural economics attempt a paradigm shift on the anthropological foundation of economics, but the use of the term “beneficial utility” reveals that they cannot escape from the neoclassical economics and the concept of marginal utility.

fluid direction, ready to serve any interest needed.

4. Psychology, technology, and politics

4.1 The political vision of surveillance capitalism: behavioural data and instrumentarian power

The endeavors of establishing a scientific examination of behaviour for its prediction and control further facilitated the focus on behaviour, leaving aside other mental phenomena contributing to human activity. But it is not just the observable behaviour that is at the center of attention. Beneath the focus on the behaviour lies a demand for the quantification and, consequently, the monetization of behavioural aspects. This is what the idea of behavioural surplus expresses: capital's ability to make a profit by finding the most beneficial ways to acquire data about any person's behaviour and eventually optimizing existing models for a more accurate prediction of behaviour. Most of all, the prediction of behaviour does not rely on a general search for an explanation of behaviour with the means of scientific methodology. It is the making of more profit that is served: the markets associated with the prediction of behaviour rely on acquiring even more accurate data for prediction by utilizing aspects like our personalities and emotions (Zuboff, 2019).

The neutrality of the subjectivity established by the aforementioned approaches facilitates the focus on behaviour and its quantification and what's of most importance is that none of these would be possible without the fundamental work of behaviourism and behavioural economics. The political vision of surveillance capitalism would not be possible without the launch of empiricism inspired by these fields.⁵ In the case of psychology, behaviourism indulged in a cult of empiricism in order to achieve objectivity. What made it a cult was partly the obsession with controlled observations (Toulmin & Leary, 1992) since it is this controlled environment that enables the quantification of behaviour. This is not indifferent to what surveillance capitalists did: within digital platforms, they induce nudges that encourage specific choices and it is this manipulation of behaviour that enables its further modification. Zuboff offers an enlightening example:

The result is data scientists trained on economies of action who regard it as perfectly normal to master the art and science of the “digital nudge” for the sake of their company's commercial interests. For example, the chief data scientist for a national drugstore chain described how his company designs automatic digital

⁵ Although human sensory experience is important to the production of (scientific) knowledge, we argue that these fields (behaviourism and behavioural economics) provided the epistemological basis for the analysis within the foundation of surveillance capitalism with specific unfavorable and narrow means for examining subjectivity. Specifically, these fields provided an empiricist approach to behaviour which not only does not include important aspects of behaviour that lie beneath the surface examined by naive empiricism and in fact explain behaviour (i.e. motives, internal conflicts, unconscious lapsus, etc.), but they also regarded as absolute the quantification of behaviour.

nudges that subtly push people toward the specific behaviors favored by the company: ‘You can make people do things with this technology. Even if it’s just 5% of people, you’ve made 5% of people do an action they otherwise wouldn’t have done, so to some extent there is an element of the user’s loss of self-control.’ (Zuboff, 2019: 294)

Surveillance capitalism is novel. Its emergence defines a break in the course of modernity or rather opens up a post-modern field: it challenges the foundations of the state, governments, and democracy in the various forms that we find in the 19th and 20th centuries. For Zuboff, the political innovation of espionage capitalism lies in the creation of a radically new form of power: *instrumentarian power*, which is defined as:

[...] the instrumentation and instrumentalization of behaviour for the purposes of modification, prediction, monetization, and control. In this formulation, “instrumentation” refers to the puppet: the ubiquitous connected material architecture of sensate computation that renders, interprets, and actuates human experience. “Instrumentalization” denotes the social relations that orient the puppet masters to human experience as surveillance capital wields the machines to transform us into means to others’ market ends. Surveillance capitalism forced us to reckon with an unprecedented form of capitalism. (Zuboff, 2019: pdf. 352)

Instrumentarian power is novel as it is radically indifferent to the beliefs, practices, and forms of consciousness developed by individuals or social groups –let alone social classes. It is radically indifferent to subjectivity. Conduct of conduct –to refer to Foucauldian biopolitics– is not concerned with the organization of the disintegration of life (Foucault, 1982), but instead allows the individual to live their life as long as they meet the imperatives of data mining. Any behaviour could be datafied. The glaring stakes of instrumentarian power, however, is that this behaviour is offered as pure, raw material, for which infinite computing power is not needed to be expended for the necessary information to be produced.

At this point we need to digress a little to describe the basic stakes of spy smoking: amidst two decades of alliterative crises starting with the “dot-com bubble,” continuing with the US insurance market crisis, the Euro financial crisis, the pandemic crisis, and of course, the current geopolitical and energy crisis, the capitalists of surveillance capitalism are trading certainty. Zuboff notes that:

Seven decades ago, Skinner’s proto-instrumentarian behavioural utopia, Walden Two, was met with revulsion. Today the real thing is inspirational fodder for surveillance capitalist rhetoric as leaders promote the tools and visions that will bring the old professor’s ideas to life... to our lives. The processes of normalization and habituation have begun. We have already seen that surveillance capitalism’s pursuit of certainty –the mandate of the prediction imperative– requires a continuous approximation to total information as the ideal condition for machine intelligence. On the trail of totality, surveillance capitalists enlarged their scope from the virtual to the real world. The reality business renders all people,

things, and processes as computational objects in an endless queue of equivalence without equality. Now, as the reality business intensifies, the pursuit of totality necessarily leads to the annexation of “society,” “social relations,” and key societal processes as a fresh terrain for rendition, calculation, modification, and prediction. (Zuboff, 2019: 398-399)

The attempt to modify human behaviour –to transform energy without unnecessary waste– into minable and accessible raw material aims at creating information which consequently aims at creating and selling certain predictions. The instrumentarian power, the political dream of surveillance capitalism, leads to the end of the societies of negotiation and the emergence of the societies of certainty. The capitalists of surveillance capitalism proclaim themselves as the answer to the chaotic social movement of the 21st century. Their ability through their instrumentation power to extract data from human behaviour gives them access to predicting future human behaviour as well. And in doing so they promise access to a certain future.

Let’s form an example to make instrumentarian power more understandable. Suppose that Mr. X drives a large-capacity motorcycle and that he consumes 3 to 4 glasses of vodka per day by paying by card. Like everyone else, he pays his bike’s regular insurance premiums, while also paying for a private insurance policy that gives him access to certain health services. Mr. X also uses the same card to pay for his membership in a boxing school. At some point, a consultancy firm is engaged to improve the insurance programme used by Mr. X. It then becomes clear that Mr. X’s behaviour creates a high risk to his insurance company, as he is likely to either crash while driving drunk or break his nose in a boxing match. This leads the insurance company to raise the motorcycle premiums and remove the nose surgery from Mr. X’s insurance plan.

The example is extremely simple. Imagine how much more complex it would become if the consultancy could access the data from the motorcycle’s brain showing how slowly or quickly he was riding at night hours, etc. The collusive data extracted by the surveillance capitalists cf. the consultancy and its experienced data analysts lead to the sale to the insurance company of the certainty that Mr. X will exercise more carefully if he knows he won’t have access to a free nose job and that, in addition to paying a bar for his usual vodkas, he will pay higher premiums.

It is important to dwell on one aspect of the above example: Mr. X cannot hide from his insurer, nor can he make sense of his behaviour differently. He has to contend with certainty, with the certain prediction that the advisory firm has produced from his behaviour. In other words: he has to reckon with himself as if he were a stranger to him, with himself as a certainty, as a system that reacts beyond his control and will.

Our reference to the insurance market in our example is by no means accidental. The safe predictions in the insurance market are yet another point of intersection between surveillance capitalism and financialization as a method of enforcing low-risk behaviours (Sotiropoulos, Milios & Lapatsioras, 2019). Insurances as financial products can reveal the role of the financial system as a technology of power that can assess the behaviour either as high or low-risk. The

instrumentarian power of the surveillance capitalists and its attempt to convert subjectivity to a datafied behaviour is a part of the risk assessment process. So the instrumentarian power is an aspect of the normative function of financial technology of power.

4.2 Nudge units: a new political practice

Let us now try to generalise the above example. If Mr. X is just a whimsical case of an insured person, what happens to Mr. X as a voter or as a member of a party or minority? How can their desirable behaviour be defined, or better, based on the distinction we have underlined above: how can they drive a beneficial but not wantable behaviour? In other words, how can Mr. X either pay more for their health insurance or stop drinking vodka?

Behavioural economics has the answer. This time not as a body of knowledge, as a science, but as a political practice. In 2008, during Barack Obama's incumbency, Cass Sunstein, the co-author of *Nudge* (2008), was hired by the federal government to organise the Office of Information and Regulatory Affairs. In 2010 the UK government formed the Behavioural Insights Team (BIT) in the UK Cabinet Office. BIT prompted those owing fines to the UK Courts Service with a text message ten days before the bailiffs were to be sent to a person, which doubled payments made without the need for further intervention. This innovation has reportedly saved the Courts Service £30 million a year by "sending people owing fines personalised text messages to persuade them to pay promptly". (Verhulst, 2014)

Similarly, the Behavioural Economics Team of the Australian Government (BETA) conducted a trial with the Australian Department of Human Services on timely reminders to report on time. Individuals on welfare payments for job seekers and students are required to report their income every fortnight before the payment is made. This is essential for the accuracy of payments. Over 80,000 individuals are late for reporting every fortnight which can result in the cancellation of payments. BETA designed three different SMS reminders to be sent the day before reporting was due. The SMS messages included a short reminder, a cost-emphasizing reminder, and a benefits-emphasizing reminder. The findings illustrate that any SMS option increased the number of individuals reporting by 13.5% at a faster rate than ones who did not receive a text. This further led to 1.7% in fewer payment cancellations (BETA, 2017).

Nudge Units' action so far may be on issues of taxation or welfare state support, but we can nevertheless discern within it a new kind of political practice. This kind of political practice ignores the conscious world of the individual; it ignores the color or the specific terms based on which it is constituted. Instead, its only interest is to provoke the appropriate stimulus. Propaganda, political campaigns, or anticipation of the outcome of an election or the outcome of a meeting seem to come from the past. States can now claim the challenge of inducing the appropriate nudges to throw off purposes beneficial to them.

5. Conclusion

In this paper, we examined the use of psychology as a means of control in the digital era. The promotion of the theory of behaviourism with its postulate that the manipulation of the environment leads to the modification and thus control of behaviour was examined within the framework of the technology of behaviour, which constitutes Skinner's answer to the social challenges. In this case, the idea that behaviour can be controlled became crucial. As we attempted to outline, behaviourism provided the epistemological background for behavioural economics, which promoted an automatic and quick operation of economic agents by rejecting the importance of any cognitive process (without rejecting their existence). It also provided the epistemological foundation of surveillance capitalism, which manages to extract data from human behaviour on digital platforms leading to the prediction of future behaviour by applying instrumentarian power. This concluded with the common conceptualization of the subject by the aforementioned approaches: they all focus on observable, quantified, and predictable behaviour which is the only aspect of the subject that can be influenced and modified through nudges as a low-risk behaviour for the production of the capital. At the same time, this abolition of subjectivity from the examination enables a neutrality characterised by infinite opportunities to nudge and modify the subject's behaviour towards any desirable direction, since no resistance emerging from the subject itself has been recognised. Finally, these endless possibilities of the desirable modification of future behaviour have been associated with the concept of certainty –against chaotic social movement– provided by capitalists which guarantees its prevalence against –what seems to be considered as– chaos or turbulence of the existing socioeconomic setting. This is the intersection between psychology, control, and the digital era.

The examination of the epistemological assumptions of behaviourism, behavioural economics, and surveillance capitalism allows us to extrapolate aspects of subjectivity that facilitate using psychology as a means of control in the digital era. Firstly, behaviourism's assumption that behaviour is controlled by the environment outlines a fundamental characteristic of the subject –according to the behaviouristic paradigm– its passivity. No other process affects behaviour, and all psychological processes or human statuses (freedom, will, etc.) are reduced to the manipulation of the environment for the desired behaviour to be achieved. Secondly, behavioural economics, by leaving aside the operation of System 2 regarding complex processing and by focusing on System 1 which is characterised by the lack of volition and an automatic character of activity, attribute an automatic and non-volitional character to subjectivity. Thirdly, surveillance capitalism, indifferent as it is to individual consciousness, belief systems, and subjectivity in general, outlines a subjectivity characterised only by its externality of behaviour and the instrumentation of this behaviour for profit. At the same time, these negative assumptions concerning subjectivity offer an opportunity to outline aspects of subjectivity that unsettle the aforementioned accounts, aspects that –if enhanced– can be an obstacle to such a control. These aspects pertain to activity, which involves an inherently active process of

internalization. Simultaneously, they enable and presuppose the interaction between external and internal elements, encompassing volition and reflection. Consciousness, as a concept transcending the individual, derives its intentionality from its fundamentally social structure. But this requires a psychology worthy of undertaking the definition and examination of the aforementioned aspects without rejecting, abolishing, or relinquishing them and, most importantly, without retaining their communal and social character.

In 1985 a book called *A century of psychology as science*, edited by Sigmund Koch and David Leary, was published in order to examine and reflect on what had happened in psychology in its first century as a science and guide it into its second century. Setting aside historiographical issues concerning the establishment of science on a specific date, as well as the evaluation of whether their work managed to guide psychology since 1985, the editors ask one simple, interesting, and very important question: “*Where do we stand at the present time?*—in relation, of course, to the historically constituted objectives of the ‘new’ psychology and the hopes of the founders” (Koch & Leary, 1992). In this paper, we attempted to outline that psychology not only hasn’t answered this question, but also that epistemological issues arising from one of the most prominent psychological theories, i.e. behaviourism, had already been used to inform the architecture of digital platforms, not for the public’s benefit or a greater purpose, but for facilitating the modification of the subject’s behaviour for big tech companies to make more profit. Moreover, we attempted to provide evidence of how the know-how developed by “digital nudges” could and partly has already been applied beyond digital platforms, in the everyday life of citizens.

The non-transparent character of digital platforms –the fact that the users don’t know how the AI systems used for the function of the platform work, how the platforms make a profit, i.e., the economic model they apply, etc.– makes it even more difficult for the public to have access to the architecture and operation of the digital environment and it further beclouds its operation. The fact that psychological knowledge is used by the architect (i.e., data scientist) to produce digital entities (like nudges) to modify human behaviour makes it a requisite not only for the psy-community but for the general public as well to understand psychology’s role in designing digital platforms. Like Koch and Leary, who asked a similar question for psychology more than three decades ago, and theoreticians who examine the digital turn (see for example De Vos, 2022), it’s time for us to ask and further examine the digital means that we don’t really understand; the digital means used as means of control in ways we can’t even imagine. The technical difficulties concerning digital technologies and the non-transparent way that big tech companies operate have already been some impediments in this endeavor –to name a few.

But isn’t subjectivity’s aim always to make sense of reality and define its next moves? The diminishment and rejection of subjectivity as non-scientific and metaphysical as well as inaccessible and useless by the science of behaviour does not only serve as a more superficial study of behaviour for its quantification, monetization, and thereby its prediction and control; it also serves as a guarantee of the current establishment and the social order, by providing certainty and

conserving the actors in the position they should be for everything to function as it already does –if not to further “optimise” the current function. Based on the aforementioned, we propose that by preserving subjectivity and its unique characteristics we may be able to resist the use of psychology as a means of control.

At least, we preserve something unique to human beings and their civilization –conceptualised as an entity– and we take the responsibility to further examine subjectivity itself, whatever the consequences. What we describe falls under Marx’s idea of alienation: the fact that the labour’s product is confronted as a power independent of the producer and “the more the worker spends himself, the more powerful becomes the alien world of objects which he creates over and against himself, *the poorer he himself –his inner world– becomes, the less belongs to him as his own*” (Marx, 1975: 272, emphasis added). Of course, in this paper we didn’t examine labour itself; but *mutatis mutandis* we can conceptualise digital technologies as products of abstract labour –which calls for further examination. Having said that and keeping in mind Marx’s extrapolations of what happens to the inner world when confronted by a world full of estranged products, created with the complicity of this inner world, there’s only one thing left to examine: *Where do we stand at the present time and where do we want to go?*

The following old aphorism remains sufficient for understanding the world:

All the notions of justice held by both the worker and the capitalist, all the mystifications of the capitalist mode of production, all capitalism’s illusions about freedom, all the apologetic tricks of vulgar economics, have as their basis the form of appearance discussed above, which makes the actual relation invisible, and indeed present to the eye the precise opposite of that relation. (Marx, 1990: 680)

The emergence of behavioural economics is another part of this process. A modern attempt to put the subject out of politics and view social transformation as a set of modified behaviours. It is a new way to achieve an old goal.

In order to overcome the nudge ideology, its behaviourism, and with it the contemporary techniques of the governance of collective capital, we must ground our politics in the concept of the subject: the subject produced from the means of production and the productive relations, the subject that is appealed by the ideology of the capitalist state and yet constantly stands against them, and therefore against itself.

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Looking at the Tekel Resistance through the Class Unconscious Approach¹

Baran Gürsel

Abstract

The article presents the conceptual foundations of the Class Unconscious Approach, proposed through a dialogue between the conceptualization of class as a process of formation/deformation and the psychoanalytic approach as well as a case study based on the Identification Stages of Class Model. Workers, in their relation to the universal experience of primary insecurity and through the effects of individual and social mediating factors, produce expressions of class experience that correspond to the Narcissistic, Ambiguous, Civilized and Symbolic-Ethical stages of class. Any set of class experiences that occur in a chosen space and time and brought to our attention by any means of communication or direct observation can be studied in terms of these stages. The theoretical discussion is accompanied by an analysis of the Tekel Resistance, a mass workers movement that gained a lot of attention and support from other sections of the society and had impacts on different levels of society, including social movements.

Keywords

psychology of class, class experience, class unconscious, identification stages of class, Tekel resistance

Introduction

I believe that the resistance initiated by Tekel workers in December of 2009, which presented itself as a “tent city” at the heart of Ankara until the March 2010, plays a critical role in the formation of *Association of Psychologists for Social Solidarity (TODAP)*—a key actor in the institutionalization and progress of critical psychology in Turkey. When the Tekel Resistance began, the debate on institutionalization within TODAP², of which I was a part, had just started.

¹ Translated by Dilara Sari

² The association was formed officially in 2010. That said, due to it being a continuation of our activities through *Critical Psychologists and Students of Psychology*, and later *Psychologists for Social Solidarity*

Discussions on class issues with relation to psychologists were ongoing; these discussions were led not only by those involved in the movement itself, but also by and within the group of people interested in critical psychology in general.

Back in the day, TODAP was treating the support it provided to Tekel workers not as “expert support” but as a “class solidarity”: “Psychologists are with our Class Brothers and Sisters” read our banner, signed by “psychologists and psychology students”; our published article³ referred to this equality in addition to the critical use of occupational knowledge. Debates on how psychologists can meet Tekel workers in class solidarity and how critical psychology can review this class solidarity and struggle continued in critical psychology platforms and all through the second *Critical Psychology Symposium*⁴, which took place in 2010. TODAP’s approach, in formation at the time, and its critique by critical psychologists were both included in the September issue⁵ of *Critical Psychology Bulletin* of the same year. The tripartite perspective included in TODAP’s introductory texts and charter, upon which the institution was resting, was clarified and solidified on paper through these discussions (Gürsel, 2010).

TODAP’s axis of labor⁶ does not center itself on “solidarity” with the worker-other, assuming all psychologists to be of the middle class; but instead builds itself on policies that respond to the needs and demands of those who are already proletariats, and those who are in the process of proletarianization. Therefore, the relations formed by the group with other segments of workers are not “from the outside” or “from above”—they are formed based on a mutuality that comes from class experience and social interests⁷. For that reason, the unique knowledge and experience provided by the discipline of psychology does not imply a structural advantage or a social domination; rather, this expertise is an experience open to the use of other segments of workers within the mutual struggle, and one which the worker psychologists will contribute to the class struggle.

I believe that the clarification, completion, and absorption of the class concept within TODAP was heavily impacted by the protests of Tekel workers, as well as by the desire of solidarity with them. The group’s approach represented by the initial statement⁸ made in support of Yörsan workers had changed by the time of the Tekel resistance. In the latter, the main motive of support came out as class solidarity and the desired functionality of a

Association Initiative, and due to the incompatibility of reducing the entire movement to officiality with our activities, I consider the beginning of TODAP to be 2008. I do believe, however, that it would be unfair to TODAP’s desire of differentiation and the alternative desires in its critique, to *directly* consider the time before the group’s meeting following the first Critical Psychology Symposium as part of TODAP’s process.

³ For further information: Psychologists for Social Solidarity Association Initiative, 2010.

⁴ For the call and the program: <http://elestirelpsikolojisesempozyumu.todap.org/2016/05/ii-elestirel-psikoloji-sempozyumu-24-26.html>

⁵ Critical Psychology Bulletin, 3-4, 2010.

⁶ Further information can be found in TODAP’s charter.

⁷ You can find some of my other studies that look into the relation psychologists have with class in Gürsel, 2013a, 2013b, 2015.

⁸ Critical Psychologists and Students of Psychology, 2008.

psychologist within class struggle. Class discussions were led simultaneously with discussions of institutionalization. To cement the approaches formed through discussions and activities, and to render the subject more recognizable and permanent, the *Association of Psychologists for Social Solidarity* was formed in December of 2010. I do not support the opinion that the formation of the association trapped TODAP in a non-horizontal process; instead, in my opinion, the group's perspective expanded over time, and its content was multiplied via the contributions of those that were in critique of it. After completing my take on Tekel Resistance through the Class Unconscious Approach, I will later return to the interpretations of institutionalization the Tekel Resistance brought to organizations like TODAP (the *Plaza-Action Platform* for instance, which began in the same era, and maintains a unique position in class struggle).

This study aims to present a review of Tekel Resistance through the Class Unconscious Approach, on which I am currently working. That review will also present ideas on how to conceptually connect the institutionalization of TODAP to the impact of the resistance. Thus, we can place the brief history I provided within a social context based on Marxism and the dialogue of psychoanalysis.⁹ I will first proceed through a conceptual discussion that will set the background for my approach and make various conceptual suggestions. I will further delve into the different stages of the class process through studying various examples from the Tekel Resistance and offer interpretations on the resistance itself. I will then complete this study by identifying certain arguments that those interpretations allow me to make.

Approaches to Psychology of Class

The purpose of the Class Unconscious Approach is to study the conscious dimensions of the *expressions of class experience*¹⁰ such as thought, discourse, action, symbol, and institutions individually or collectively produced by the workers through the relation they have to the unconscious thought, fantasy, anxiety, desire, identification and defenses; as well as identifying the state of a worker or a group of workers according to the class formation and deformation

⁹ The framework of this study was taken over from another study that I conducted, *Looking at the Resistance of June 15-16 through the Class Unconscious Approach* (Gürsel, 2020), which focuses on a different workers movement, again through the lens of the Class Unconscious Approach. Some of the ideas presented on the Tekel Resistance had also been previously presented, in their very early stage, at the VI. Critical Psychology Symposium, during a presentation on *Class Unconscious: A Phenomenon Between Critical Psychology and the Theory of Class*. With the focus on the article continuing—hopefully—to mature, this study both reflects some of those similarities, but also carries some differences. To see the early stages, you may look at Gürsel, 2018a, 2018b, 2018c.

¹⁰ This concept was derived in line with Wood's understanding of class (2008a) to make visible everything produced by the class through class experience, which is considered as the central component of class distinction. The concept of a "class formation and deformation process" as used in the text is itself derived from Wood's definition of class as a process based in (vertical and horizontal) relation formation, and the innateness of non-formation/ inability to formation/ deformation. Compatible with Wood's approach, this concept will stand against the notion that "class process"—in its briefer version—is solely limited to the formation of classes, and instead, it will oversee the formation and deformation of this state, as well as other possibilities.

process, and to reveal both the *effects* that serve to create that state, and the *mediating factors* that cause those effects. Before I proceed to presenting the theoretical discussion on which this approach is based on, I would like to touch upon the relation it has to various other studies within the field of *psychology of class*.

To me, psychology of class is a field of study and thought that overlaps with a wide range of approaches—from mainstream to the critical, from psychological to sociological. Some of these approaches and schools of thought are: Mainstream industrial/ organizational psychology, critical industrial/ organizational psychology, psychology of labor and work, labor studies that benefit sociology of emotions, immaterial labor approaches, clinical sociology, studies shaped by Bourdieu's understanding of habitus, the sociological and cultural approach of Paul Willis, and finally, Thompson's logic of class experience.

While mainstream industrial/ organization psychology focuses on subjective notions like the emotions, behaviors and thoughts of workers within the framework of the work itself, its process, the space within which it occurs, the management overseeing it and other similar factors (Tevruz, 1996), critical industrial psychology instead analyzes the relation the mainstream approach has to social power structures, and highlights the significance of the worker's potential and the researcher's self-reflexive approach (İslam and Zyphur, 2012).

Psychology of labor and work studies the detrimental impact of the capitalist wealth acquisition regime and its labor ideology on the individual's life in and outside work, and derives arguments on their relation, and on alternative approaches (Sandıkçı, 2019).

Labor studies that take from the sociology of emotions focus on the emotions, emotional tension and changes that occur within the states, reflections and relations of being a worker in the social universe and study the dynamic subjectivity of being a worker in social relations (Dinler, 2014). The immaterial labor approach centers around processes that exist in the current order where all social life is subject to how capital works and what counts as labor remains elusive. They transform subjectivity itself into a material of production and produce a perspective on the subjectivity of the new form of labor through an analysis of the current form of capitalism and how it can be overcome (Lazaratto, 2005). Clinical sociology is rooted in the argument that a different labor ideology persists today than in the past and it highlights the relations formed between the worker and its labor, the identification and emotional investments and the tension, conflict and disturbance caused by this modern labor ideology (De Gaulejac, 2013.)

Bourdieu's concept of habitus looks into how the distinction between classes, the feelings and movements that have been allocated have been internalized within the subjectivity of the worker, and how they are reproduced through externalization as social differences (1979/2017). Paul Willis' approach, however, aims to explain how class distinction within the framework of education, institutionalism and in-house relations is formed through subjective attitudes and behavior in a mutual relation with cultural codes (2017). Thompson

(1978, 1963/2012) approaches the working class as a formation related to class subjectivity, and in telling the story of how class subjectivity, pressured by a social objectivity, is molded through values, emotions, affections, religious experience, group activities, humor, symbol and institutions, reveals how workers turn into a class.

Despite all their differences, these approaches all place various implications of a worker's subjectivity (from values to emotions, from individual behavior to collective action) at a central position in their theorization, and work to establish the relation between that subjectivity with social objectivity. Even though the distance with which the worker's subjectivity stands to the center of the approach differs from one to the other, excluding this line of thought from these approaches will surely hollow out their substance—therefore, it makes sense to perceive psychology of class as a distinctive crossroad. The answer as to why I chose not to define this area as “labor psychology” can be found in studying how these approaches work, and in their limitation to the discipline of psychology.

The Class Unconscious Approach can be taken, similar to others, as a window to the psychology of the class; however, this approach refuses to limit itself to certain pieces or dissectional views of the worker's subjectivity. On the contrary, the suggestion here is to include and interpret all individual and collective expressions of the workers, the spaces (workspace or outside of it), the period of time (neoliberal period, or prior to it), various aspects of the subjectivity (individual or group, blue collar or white), the forms of psychological components (emotions, thoughts, likes, values, actions or symbols) and the expressions (resistance), regardless of whether they need to be dealt with by other disciplines. This approach claims to “converse” with others on their “study objects”, without denying the uniqueness of how they theorized their impressions. This is not rooted solely in the argument that psychoanalysis is a comprehensive theory of the mind, but also in the idea that all expressions of class experience can be placed on a formation/ deformation line. Thus, class perspectives pointed out, identified and explained by the *Identification Stages of Class Model* can be included within this approach.

From here, we may move on to discussing the model and the approach.

Relations of Capitalist Production and Subjective Primary Insecurity

Historical materialism considers the action of people, and the social relations built through them (Marx and Engels, 1845/2004; Wood, 2008b), as the material of history. Relations of production are formed around and through production, and since all societies must deal with the material production of life, these relations constitute the principal organizations of social nature (Wood, 2008a).

Even though the capitalist formation of these relations makes certain parts of them (e.g. means of production, means of livelihood, products) appear as though they possess powers unique unto themselves (Marx and Engels, 1845/2004), and cause labor to be experienced as part of the person (Marx, 1867/2015), production is not outside of social relations and is indeed one of them

(Wood, 2008b). Wood (2008c) questions the usefulness of the superstructure-infrastructure metaphor arguing that the use of the metaphor often results in identifications, separations, and discourses that are incompatible with Marx' perspective.

To Wood, relations of production are not independent of what is considered as superstructure—legal, political, ideological and cultural elements—but are direct carriers of their certain forms. Relations of production cannot be considered as independent from the political and legal elements that create and constitute them; even in capitalism, a unique production type based on the formal separation of economic and political power, exploitation occurs, unlike in precapitalist forms, through an economic method. Political intervention to initiate structural transformations in property relations are needed to set capitalist relations, to render the exploiter and the exploited subject to market obligations, and to enable the exploitation of surplus value.

Capitalism is not the result of a self-developing economy, of the processes of wealth accumulation or of the desire of wealth at the right opportunity, but rather that of the appearance of market obligations as a result of certain struggles under certain historic conditions, and of the struggle to expand those obligations' domination (Wood, 2003). Here, class struggle occurs to enable and maintain the seizure of labor through economic methods, rather than non-economic ones.

In capitalism, the process of production is not entirely excluded from the political struggle occurring to exert the domination of these economic obligations. Wood (2008b) forms a continuity between the property owner's domination of the production process and the privatization of political power in the West. According to her, not only has the economic field been differentiated, but production has also been integrated into property ownership, and politics have been privatized. Oppressive political functions have settled into the private space of the property owner. All these discussions relay production relations to us as a framework extending beyond a pure, abstract and economic nature.

Compatible to this approach, I believe we can identify psychological elements that are components of the capitalist relations of production. I argue that capitalism, which cannot exist independently of political, legal, and social conditions, creates psychological circumstances for every worker through subjection to the market, commodification of labor power and limited access to livelihood to labor. Thompson (1978) talks about the influence of capitalism's sphere of power as an objective force in the formation of class experience. This sphere of power forces people to change their lives in certain directions and, by forcing them, communizes what they experience with others—and what others experience with themselves. If the capitalist market universally forces the worker to work in order to live, *objective primary insecurity* may have a subjective and universal counterpart. I identify that counterpart as the *subjective primary insecurity* and place it at the heart of *class experience*—which is emphasized by Wood, in reference to Thompson, in defining class as relationship and process: Subjective primary insecurity as a universal experience that, through their own experience and the experiences of others whom they observe, causes in all workers a potential to act.

Wood (2008a), through Thompson's approach, states that class experience plays a critical role in overcoming the methodical dualisms of theorizing class. Class experience helps solve that dualism by exerting itself as a transitory concept between structural position and the subject's action. Class (working class) is the process of interpretation and realization of class experience that begins to form due to the effect of the position in the relations of production. Class is formed through interpretations—verbal, actional or institutional—that develop through the common interests of the exploited as positioned against the exploiter. Wood (2008a), starting from the difference set by Thompson (1963/2012) between being a worker and being a class, develops and expands the potential of that perspective, and refers to it to better comprehend the role of all classes.

Marx' history as class struggle gains momentum from the tension between class relations and relations of production. As classes antagonize each other through their struggle to produce and reproduce themselves, tensions with relations of production can turn into crises. Solutions to these crises require class interventions that can create historic transformations: struggles and interventions drive history. What constitutes common ground within the class experience—or whether or not it exists at all—can be dealt with separately for each class. My perspective states that the claim for the common experience of the working class is based on the objective primary insecurity as a state universally faced by workers.

Subjective primary insecurity can be taken together with the fundamental, primary helplessness that a baby enters at birth. According to Freud (1926/1959), the baby comes to the earth in helplessness, and is dependent on the other/object to calm internal stimulants and fulfill survival needs. This absolute dependency is the source of baby's experience of the object as omnipotent (Laplanche and Pontalis, 1988). Winnicott (1974) emphasizes that the process of moving—via the facilitating functions of the environment—from absolute dependency to relative dependency, and finally to independency, always carries within the threat of regression. The experience of helplessness continues to exist in the unconscious through the fear of falling back into it. To Winnicott, however, ego exists, matures, and unifies when it goes through psychosomatic experience and primary narcissism, as against the experience of destruction.

In their discussion of narcissism, Laplanche and Pontalis (1988) argue that infantile narcissism corresponds with the formation of ego, highlighting the formation of self through a narcissistic identification with the other as a fundamental thought for psychoanalysis. Lacan (1949/2006) also forms a connection between the fictional side of ego—the ideal self—and narcissistic identification. The narcissistic identifications underlying ego are not the only form of identification that impacts the formation of subjectivity. The first of Freud's three types of identification is an identification of this kind, being the primary form of emotional attachment to the object (1921/2017). The second type of identification sees connection to the object as a substitution to a psychological agent, whereas the final type of identification is built upon a perceived commonality with a person.

We will further discuss these and similar other types of identifications and classifications during the section on the stages of the model. What really deserves attention here is Freud's emphasis on the role of identifications in the formation of subjectivity, and on their relation to anxieties. The referenced text (Freud, 1921/2015), includes anxieties felt in survival, in the loss of the object's affection, and in positions of dependency. Freud (1913/2014) also draws attention to identifications that can form towards the overcoming of the state of dependency by bringing about the end of a cruel power. Bion (1961/2004), too, sets group relations that can utilize thought capacity and creativity, occurring within the framework of identifications built on common ideas and goals, apart from group relations investing on infantile ideals, and relations, where the leader substitutes the psychological object.

With limited access to livelihood, those who have been turned into workers become dependent on wages and on the work and the people that can provide them. This situation, which can be likened to the object dependency of an infant, constitutes the state of objective primary insecurity; subjective primary insecurity can be seen as its psychological projection. Coming from a similar angle, Chibber points to the desire to work behind certain cultural codes as an urge that is the obligatory result of the objective deprivation of the worker. Thus, the state of subjective primary insecurity involves the anxieties awakened by the same urge, but preceding that desire.

These experiences are the universal core of class experience, as referenced by Thompson (1963/2012), where workers are communized. The workers, in turn, formulate identifications that seek to psychologically process these experiences, to put into order internal stimulants, and to render anxieties durable; these identifications become sources of desires not limited to the desire to work. Identification formed with other objects are excluded from this model, and some of these identifications are formed towards *objects related to the relations of productions (capital, employer, labor force, commodity, money, state, politics, the law, unions, workers' organizations, workers, etc.)*. Expressions of class experience are produced upon the foundation of these identifications; if we are to look at them from the other way around, we can make deductions on identifications and anxieties by interpreting expressions of class experience.

I will further delve into forms of identifications that workers can develop through that process, but first, we must clarify the concept of the *class unconscious*.

The Dual Quality of the Class Experience and the Class Unconscious

According to Wood (2008a), Thompson developed an approach that combined historic determination with history as made by people in response to the critique of not treating culture as an autonomous field and of reducing class to culture and ideology. As objective determinators, relations of production impact the historical persons that carry historical heritage, tradition and values. Capitalist relations of production do not touch abstract people who appear at that very

moment; instead they touch those who live within certain continuities. These relations pressure them and force them to change their lives. People carry their own histories to social relations they have been pushed towards; they are impacted by these relations and effectively develop mechanisms of affection, thought and action. People are the objects of social processes and are affected by them, while simultaneously being social creatures with material power that *affect* those processes. Even in situations where they appear passive, each person is a subject that develops active responses and makes those responses visible in a wide spectrum, from cultural codes to actions (Thompson, 1995).

Thompson connects through the concept of “experience” the determinative quality of limitations created by social relations and drawn out through human actions as well as that of creating these limitations and the act of transforming them. Experience stands between people as “social creature” through their material relations and the “social consciousness” that expresses the self-consciousness of that creature (Trimberger, 2014). In other words, experience is the field of transition, transformation, and translation between the determining and determined. Experience stands as the *determined* factor in a person’s encounter with the social creature and as the *determining* factor, when people affect their own state and act on common or conflicting interests. This transitory nature of Thompson’s theory is why it stays central to Wood’s class approach. Experience as created by relations of production and exploitation comes to life through the interpretation and action of the experience of the exploited, who come together to constitute the foundation of class.

Class experience taken as the determined and the determining provides us the ground floor for the class unconscious. At one end, we witness the psychological traces of relations of production which the subject will have to deal with in various ways (the determined aspect of experience), and at the other, we see the attempt to translate these traces effectively into assessments, emotions, actions and institutions (the determining aspect of experience.) We can take the determining aspect of the class experience as *class consciousness*. Class consciousness points towards the understanding of thought, action, and interests of the class within the structure of the society, and the unification and synthesis of the causes and the results. Therefore, towards the development of revolutionary intervention (Lukacs, 1967/2014). This is one aspect of experience—which brings up the question: Can we call the other (determined) aspect of experience, the objective traces upon which individual and collective construction occurs, the *class unconscious*? Yes, and no.

In their summary and discussion of Freud’s topographic approach, Laplanche and Pontalis (1988) shine a light on the separation of unconsciousness from the preconsciousness-consciousness on account of function, content and process, highlighting the dynamic approach and the contradiction between these two systems. According to Freud (1915/2013), the unconscious is made up of drive representations: unconscious thoughts come from displacement and condensation processes; urge representations are ordered as fantasies. To Freud, reaching pleasure is the main principle, and it needs no reality, doubt, certainty, or time. Freud’s differentiation of psychological agents, which comes later on,

replaces his conceptualization of the contradictions and relations among systems of the unconscious and the preconscious-conscious, defining id, ego and superego (1923/ 2012).

The id is completely unconscious, but the other agents have varying levels of unconsciousness. Ego, for instance, contains compulsive defenses; superego is home to unconscious prohibitions and demands (Laplanche and Pontalis, 1988). Laplanche and Pontalis (1988) relate Freud's move from the first approach to the second—replacing the relation between two systems with relations between psychological agents—to his realization of the role identifications play in the permanent structures of personality. Therefore, identifications play an important role in both the formation of the psyche, and the unconscious. Özyıldırım (2022) has a critical perspective on Freud (1920/ 2013) arguing for the existence of a death instinct through his writing on the possibility of a principle in psyche beyond pleasure. According to Özyıldırım, that deduction prevents Freud from seeing that unconscious representations born out of the mother-infant relation form a primary connection that enables the functioning of the pleasure principle; that repetitive appearances come from the malfunctioning of that connection. So the unconscious is both determined and actively determining, as its organization is formed through relations and identifications with the objects and carrying the contents and processes of the agents.

Within this framework, the class unconscious is the unconscious thoughts, identifications and anxieties related to the primary insecurity that is experienced during the formation and deformation of class. In other words, *the class unconscious is the unconscious dimension of the class process*¹¹. These unconscious elements play an active role in the production of conscious expressions, and in broader terms, of expressions of the class experience. As presented by Lukacs (1967/2015), if class consciousness is considered as completed expressions that the primary insecurity has turned into symbols based on egalitarian identifications, carrying desires of transforming the social reality, then the class unconscious can refer both to the forces that shape it and to the raw material itself (Gürsel, 2018b). The Identification Stages of Class Model can provide the opportunity to study this relationship even further.

¹¹ Though it is important to discuss how the concept differentiates from “class consciousness” and “habitus,” it is better to do so in other mediums. Just to give the reader an overall idea, some points can be briefly presented. “The class unconscious” is designed as a concept above the deformation of the “class consciousness” or its absence as “lack of class consciousness.” It defines the active unconscious dimension that is present both in situations where conscious examples of the class process completed in emotion, word and action are dominant as well as in situations where they are now. In situations dense with unconscious identifications and defenses, egalitarian identifications will obviously suffer, and appearances of the class consciousness will diminish. It can be argued that in examples where the class consciousness appears more completed, the unconscious experiences will begin to have less weight, and get turned into symbols. What we truly need is an approach that goes beyond whether or not it exists; one that provides the opportunity to study the relations in between in both cases. Despite defining class in different terms, the “habitus” approach does highlight the unconscious identifications formed with the group, and between groups, but it still falls short of providing enough room to study the contrasts and contradictions between identifications, as well as the diversity among the objects of identification.

The Identification Stages of Class Model

Through various mediating factors, workers translate the primary insecurity experience during class formation and deformation into various individual and collective expressions of the class experience. There may be emotions, thoughts, words, actions, symbols, organizations, institutions, etc. that are produced during the class process—which begins with being forced to work, or in other words, proletarianization (Wood, 2008a) and is expected to end with class dismantling capitalist relations of production, along with itself (Marx and Engels, 1845/2004). The mediating factors that distinguish the production of expressions can be taken as working conditions, the labor supervision processes, qualities of the political climate, state pressure, the class history of the family, socioeconomic status, occupation, gender, sexual orientation, sexual identity, social relations of various levels, biographical stories, daily events, etc. By structuring identification tables applicable to limited (with a set beginning and an end) time-space sections, this model aims to open the relation between the expressions of experience and the factors to further study, and to render the class unconscious recognizable.

	<i>Proletarianization</i>	<i>Resisting proletarianization</i>
<i>Hierarchical Identifications</i>	Cluster A The Narcissistic Stage of Class	Cluster B The Ambiguous Stage of Class
<i>Egalitarian Identifications</i>	Cluster C The Civilized Stage of Class	Cluster D The Symbolic-Ethical Stage of Class

Table 1

The Identification Stages of Class Model (Table 1) stands on two axes: the first one represents the identifications that form the fundamental contradiction of class psyche (proletarianization and resisting proletarianization); the second one represents the two levels of identification that form the basis for expressions of class experience (hierarchical and egalitarian).

The root of the idea that sees psychology of class as divided along the line of contradiction between *proletarianization* and *resisting proletarianization* lies with Holloway's (2011a) argument that the current conditions of capitalism force the person to split between classification and resisting classification. According

to Holloway (2011a, 2011b), on one hand is the domination by abstract labor, the transformation of labor into labor force, the pressure of abstract labor fencing concrete labor; and on the other is the resistance to that pressure, the tendency to avoid the domination of abstract labor and being reduced to labor force and the attempts at overcoming it. These two contradicting tendencies interrupt the person's psyche and turns into a struggle occurring in the subjectivity of that person. With everyone living under the real subsumption, Holloway (2011b) associates this contradiction to all people.

However, we will use Holloway's idea to make sense of the internal conflict of those with a worker status. We will also employ the same "translation" between concepts and choose proletarianization and resistance to proletarianization over classification and resistance to classification. This is based on the distinction, as previously discussed, between being a worker and being a class. It is sensible to maintain that distinction; this text's perception of being a class includes the acceptance of the domination of abstract labor, as well as the attempts of undermining it and striving towards its destruction. An acceptance and internalization that does not recognize its destructive aspect or relies on the attempt of denial is only unique to certain and "early" stages of class. Therefore, Holloway's concepts must be made compatible with that understanding.

The levels of identification, which make up the second axis of the model, stem from Freud's approach on identifications with authority or siblings. While theorizing on the relations urges have with existing within a group, Freud argues hypothetically that humans decided to build a new order that replaced a patriarch's absolute power and prohibitions with one that is based on a new contract and defined common rules (1913/ 2014). At this stage, private interest was swapped with the laws of the group, which prevents the domination of anyone's private interest; thus a sense of law based on group relations was constructed. As patricide became an internalized prohibition, that law changed into "the law of the father." Still, according to Özyıldırım (2018), the "law of the father" as presented in Freud can be considered an abstraction of the siblings' later internalization of collective action and rules. This law regulates the relation among equals and refers to a contract created by mutual sacrifice. Rather than the irregular and whimsical act of the authority, the law of the siblings brings about a collective law that is limiting, binding, and leveling to all.

As siblings and generations grow apart, they grow closer through laws and roles. Marcuse claims that throughout human history, Freud's ties of fraternity fall short of completion, and are instead overrun with different types of guilt and father figures (1968/2016). In that context, sibling ties that limit private and aggressive interests point towards *egalitarian identifications*, as opposed to hierarchical ones. Freud (1915/2015) draws attention to the risk of regression where group and social relations, formed egalitarian, can regress towards hierarchical (and aggressive) ones. In a similar vein, Freud (1921/2015) mentions instances of where, upon replacement of a psychological agent—loss of an object—via regression with a leader, relations are built with other members of the group through identification with the leader. These are equal to hierarchical

identifications. As Bion (1961/2004) points out, egalitarian identifications can be formed in non-dependent groups; identifications occur among group members through certain ideas and ideals, which give way to a mutual creativity.

The Identification Stages of Class Model, based on four types of identification, allows for a two-way motion, forward and backward: from A to D, or D to A. The movement from A to D represents progress in class process, *the formation of class*; while movement from D to A represents regression of the class process, *the deformation of class*. Class formation is the experience of symbolization of primary insecurity in the psyche. This psychological transformation favors transforming of relations with the outer world as well. As progress takes place, workers demand purifying the outer world from oppressive ways, and for it to change in ways that are more complete. They begin experiencing their active status beyond being the passive receivers or components of power. That is why I refer to the effect of the mediating factors that contribute to class formation and push class forward as *transformative symbolization*. Class deformation, however, signals the separation of the experience of primary insecurity from preconsciousness-consciousness via various defenses, or its abandonment without processing. This psychological transformation favors isolation and avoidance in its relations to the outer world. Therefore, I refer to the effect of factors that regress and deform class as *avoidant defense formation*.

The four clusters/stages of class do not follow one another in a linear time frame, and a single phenomenon (expressions of the class experience of a worker or a group of workers within a certain period) is not limited to a single stage. Rather, stages are differentiated qualitatively, and any phenomenon is capable of holding expressions of class experience that correspond to each stage. I will be handling the Tekel Resistance as a phenomenon of such and study how the process can be seen through the stages and the framework of the model. I must pause here to briefly mention another aspect of the method. During the discussion, I will be using indirect material on the Tekel Resistance; though even direct observance may be considered as indirect due to the perspective, conscious and unconscious aspects of the observer. What will be used here as material will be the reflections from two documentaries that investigate the resistance.

It must be taken into consideration that the visual and narrative elements of both documentaries remain unedited and provide the opportunity for transparent observance. The interpretations that come from them will be based on observation, but will also carry the shadow of what has been left outside. Whether or not that shadow risks the validity of the interpretation may be discussed elsewhere—and can only be revealed by comparing interpretations from studying more material. I am confident, however, that the interpretations and deductions as made in this text—whether they are debated against alternative data and alternative methods—hold a certain internal integrity that can sustain those debates. That is the purpose of the model.

Of the two documentaries chosen for inspection: Murat Utku's *Direnışçi* (*The Resister*)¹² (2010) looks into the 78 days in which the resistance was occurring, while *Tekel 51* (2010) by TAKSAV's Cinema Workshop documents only the 51st day of the resistance. The former was chosen due to its documentation of the whole period of resistance; and the latter due to its intensified gaze into a single day, and therefore its capacity to include certain elements otherwise left out by *The Resister*.

Class Identification Stages and the Tekel Resistance

A. The Narcissistic Stage of Class and the Ideological Effect

The primary appearances of the class process is part of this cluster. The primary state of that appearance is not an issue of time but of quality—even though not all class processes begin there, this stage contains the “earliest” identifications that each class process can potentially regress to; it can also be considered as a starting point that borders on proletarianism, is obligatory, and has nothing prior to it. Expressions falling under this stage are built on the idealization of objects related to the relations of production, on the subsequent internalization of these persistent objects, and their inclusion into self.

According to Lacan, the ideal ego, as the fictional side of self, comes from the child absorbing a complete, fundamental, and stable object (1949/ 2006). As mentioned before, this narcissistic identification provides the child with the first unity of ego. In their review and discussion on the concept of idealization, Laplanche and Pontalis (1988) highlight that the idealized object is internalized as ideal, and thus made part of ego itself. Therefore, expressions of class experience that fall under this stage refer to this kind of relations with objects connected to relations of production. Marx' “commodity fetishism” (1867/2015) and Lucaks' “reification” (2014) define the kind of relation that occurs as the worker idealizes the labor force, accepts it as absolute and unchangeable, internalizes it as part of self, and self-defines through it. Here, “worker” is being internalized as an identity and, through identification with an object in a *hierarchical* status, *proletarianization* takes place.

Primary insecurity is experienced in different ways on each stage, while becoming the foundation for identifications in all stages. With the primary stage bordering on deprivation and insecurity, that border translates to a case of survival and death. Chibber sees deprivation as a driving force for that reason: working is necessary to survive, and according to Chibber, that is why working is desired (2017). Therefore, it can be said that primary insecurity at this stage is experienced as the anxiety of *perishing or being destroyed*. We have already

¹² The documentary was awarded the “Best Documentary” title in the 43rd Turkish Cinema Awards. For further info, you may look at: <https://m.bianet.org/bianet/diger/128170-en-iyi-belgesel-odulu-murat-utku-nun-direnisci-sine>. I am mentioning this as a way to draw attention to the institutional signification and credibility of the work; beyond that, this is not the place to discuss the status or the award, or the documentary as compared to others of its kind.

mentioned that, as Winnicot (1974) suggests, the anxiety of perishing, which represents the deepest desperation of a person, also forms the basis for idealization and identification with an ideal object.

When we look at the Tekel Resistance through the *Direnışçi* and *Tekel 51* documentaries, we observe that the expressions that can be placed in this cluster as opposed to others are quite few. At this stage, we can study the idealizations in *Tekel 51* expressions such as “*In this country...I did everything this country told me to do. Do I have to be dispensable after that?*” (Tekel 51, Episode 1, 6:10); “*Just like our friend said, we did everything our country told us to do. What else can we do?*” (Tekel 51, Episode 1, 6:31); “*What did I do? I served this country, I paid my taxes, I worked for this country...then pity me, do not pity me. Not giving me what’s mine—I don’t want that. I don’t want it... just give me what’s rightfully mine,*” (Tekel 51, Episode 1, 6:38). Here, the relation to the idea of “country” can be perceived as an idealization relation. In related expressions, “country” appears at the root of identity as an authority figure whose demands must be met, to which occurs an imagined relation of complete compatibility. What’s imagined here is a relation where the assumed expectation is a perfect match to its response. In that relation, as the authority figure is set, being a worker is defined as an activity done for the sake of that figure, resembling servitude, and matching the opposing figure’s expectations with something compatible (tax).

Ideological effect is what gives way to expressions of this kind that fall under the narcissistic stage of class. This effect occurs on the primary insecurity experience that is created by the process of proletarianization; and serves to ideologize that experience. We can define the “ideological effect” as the effect that perceptively places the subject within a network of social relations (based on power). Through the ideological effect, the subject constructs a position and an identity related to that position. As is apparent in the previous expressions, thinking that the position may be lost creates a perception of the position that is idealized. The ideological effect here has a regressive nature; it can trap the worker within an understanding of proletariat as an abstract and conflict-free identity, one that resembles a form of citizenship. We will soon be seeing that these effects (ideological, institutional, memory) may not be directly related to the factors we think they are related to; the root of the ideological effect may not be the complete “ideology” and can be transferred through factors such as institutions and actions as well. Looking at the documentaries, we cannot differentiate through which factors that ideology is being carried, but it may be possible that a “public” ideology which focuses on the welding of worker and state, was carried through workers and their organizations. Since that line of study exceeds the documentary’s limits, it will be subject to a different discussion.

B. The Ambiguous Stage of Class and Ideological, Institutional Effects

Klein argues that at the stage of the individual psyche that is defined as paranoid-schizoid, the self divides itself and part-objects and objects as good and bad to preserve itself and objects (1921/2008). That divide is the source of ambiguous attitudes and emotions towards objects. Abraham draws attention to the fact that following a stage that can be considered narcissistic, and until love and aggression is united, we go through ambivalent stages, where hostile emotions accompany love. The object is simultaneously loved and hated. If the object is assigned aggression, it becomes a cause of fear and doubt towards the object, and of a feeling of being under its cruel oppression (Klein, 1946). In the existence of projections, the line between self and objects, between internal and external world, is elusive (Klein, 1923/ 2008). As is emphasized in the works of Laplanche and Pontalis (1988), ambivalent attitudes and emotions towards an object are psychological elements that are not simply in contrast to each other, but stand next to each other, and preserve their strength despite contradiction, while resisting synthesis. The ambivalence is related to the state of hesitancy, which exists both in a conflicting double existence, and in what Klein (1923/ 2008) connects to failed divisions and syntheses, as well as the failure of structuring a trusted “good.”

Identifications that create the expressions that fall under this stage rest on fantasies, where- unlike unity, saturation, and lack of conflict- one is both part of the hierarchical objects and fearful of their power. Fear and hatred accompany the idealization of objects. Anna Freud’s process of identification with the aggressor can be considered as an identification that belongs to this stage (1937/1983). That identification refers to being in the position of -or trying to be like- the authority figure in order to overcome the threat coming from him/her. Here, according to Lagache (1962, referred by Laplanche and Pontalis, 1988), the other is misperceived, restrained, and destroyed. In that context, identifications with an authority figure indicate a control relation with the other. The hierarchical identifications with elements like state, commodity, and employer are also carriers of the desire to overthrow, to reject, to replace, to control—even without a tendency to deform the hierarchy; there is a *resistance to proletarianization* in question. Within the framework of hierarchical identification, one enters an ambiguous relation and struggle with authority; this is accompanied by *horizontal* differentiations and struggles against equal others in exploitation/oppression relations, rather than *vertical* struggles and differentiations that come through the recognition and symbolization of the difference from the authority.

Qualities resigned to dominant elements such as omnipotence, overcontrolling, having no limits, and the notion that what is needed can be found with them, are experienced simultaneously with the anxieties of retaliation and cruelty. Therefore, at this stage, the primary insecurity can be seen as *the anxiety of being persecuted*. As opposed to the previously mentioned anxiety of perishing, the anxiety of being persecuted comes from the belief that the self, or

parts of it, is or will be taken under control by pressure, creating an experience of deprivation and pain.

Direnışçi (The Resister) shows the complicated relation between anger and pain. A worker utters the words, “*We are making the children get used to hunger. We are now teaching them how to feed themselves with very little money*” (Direnışçi, 14:46). The expression here contains both anger and pain; but here, as pain becomes anger, anger is expressed through showing of the suffering, and is expectant of the visibility of it. In the imaginary moment here, the state which teaches to suffer (hunger) is also identified with; therefore, the hierarchical identification is next to the anger felt towards the object of that identification. A similar dynamic is apparent in the words of another worker: “*The selfishness is really bad. This is how a country can be run—this is the worst a country can be run. And we don’t understand why they insist on it when today, whichever court we go to, they know the workers will win*” (Direnışçi, 20:17).

What is worthy of mentioning is that the negative notions about the state here are next to positive assumptions. In talking about not understanding why the government is insisting, the expression seemingly refers to a “good” side of the government. It refers to a hierarchical identification: to the notion that the state does and will think like a worker—it will have a sense of justice, and respect. The emphasis on a “good” quality appears related to the denial of the conflict of interest that exists in between, and the attempt to distance the “bad” interest of the other. The misspoken words at the beginning where the word “bad” gets dropped mistakenly (from *this is how...a country can be run*) is indicative of this argument. The negative thought appears expressed, but its existence within the sentence remains undecided. How the “bad” will be incorporated into the thought is not completely understood.

Expecting conscience, pity and guilt in the following expressions from *Tekel 51* comes from a relation based on imagined comradeship and affection with something not equal, but hierarchical: “*If the prime minister is in good conscience, if he calls himself a believer...let him go on TV... if can make a living with 700 lira...I will sign it, right away... Should these kids become drug addicts, violent attackers? Isn’t it a sin, what’s being done to us? Everyone has a regular life... we can’t live like them... We do not have villas; we have nothing*” (Tekel 51, Episode 2, 5:03); “*What is this? This prime minister is inflicting this on us. If his son goes hungry for a day, will he be able to stand it? If his children come here under this snow, in this time of winter, and join us, will he also accept it? We brought him to power twice...He is now very spoiled*” (Tekel 51, Episode 2, 3:52); “*Enough, pity us, what is this state? We have been destitute here for fifty-one days*” (Tekel 51, Episode 4, 7:22). Control in these thoughts has been completely surrendered, via the “hope” of being seen, to the object in that position. The anticipation of comradeship in emotion can be detected in the following lines: “*If he tells us that this is our livelihood...If he can provide for my kitchen, for my everything—we are OK with that. We do not want his salary, his ships; we want our rights. What’s wrong with that?*” (Tekel 51, Episode 4, 5:13). The present emphasis here on the desire to retain whatever the other has

harms the antagonistic quality of the concept of “right,” which can be considered as related to the previously discussed anxieties of being persecuted.

A similar hierarchical identification formed with the union can be seen in here as well: *“Our respect to the union’s decision is infinite; we did not come here on our own. We came this far with a union head leading us, we should follow his judgement”* (Direnişçi, 41:35). The hierarchical identification formed with the union and the president here differs from the identification present in a statement such as: *“There is a decision made by the union. Of course, this doesn’t mean we will be going back home and sleep. We’ll be doing things in the places we go; we will be preparing action plans by talking to people”* (Direnişçi, 41:5). The latter expression signals something beyond contentment with the union’s decision; following the recognition of the decision as a reality, expressions of egalitarian identifications and common activization follow. In the former, however, the referral is not to the recognition of a reality, but to compatibility within a hierarchical identification and to the idea of unity with the authority. That tendency of identification aligns with the sentiment in the expression *“Why are they breaking our strike? Dismantling our tents is breaking the strike. We don’t want our tents to be removed”*; and with the slogan *“The tents remain, the resistance persists”* (Direnişçi, 41:02).

As seen in the previous expressions, the hierarchical identification with the union shows itself in the passive assumptions that occur following the recognition of reality, rather than searching for ways of activization; the latter expressions show the denial of passiveness through a sudden move. In a similar vein, the union is assigned omnipotence, but with the recognition of its cruel use of that power; the attempt is to reverse the grievance felt from that through the rejection of the current state. This interpretation, independent of right or wrong, refers to the division of the resisting workers group into subgroups that contradict in idea, but are equal on identification levels.

What causes these types of expressions that fall under the ambiguous stage of class are two kinds of effects that come from various factors within the context. The first one is the previously discussed **ideological effect**. In contrast to Cluster A, the ideological effect here has affected towards progressive—in other words, transformative—symbolization, and caused expressions in the ambiguous stage. We have previously defined the (regressive) ideological effect in the narcissistic cluster through its positioning of the subject within a network of social relations. The (progressive) ideological effect here comes from the feeling that what was promised through that positioning has not been delivered. What gives way to the class expressions under Cluster B is the relation and tension between the expectation from the subject’s ideological positioning and the state of deprivation that the subject is currently in. That is why these expressions contain the notion that what’s being done is immoral, “sinful,” and against what has been promised as well as sentiments of surprise and objection such as “how come?” and “why?”

The documents reveal that certain statements from Erdoğan, the prime minister at the time, and statements from other government officials are among the factors that contribute to these effects. By voicing “ideology” in his

statements, the prime minister's words about the strike appear as a blatant attempt at pushing the discussions towards ideological ground: *"An unfair strike... It is an ideological strike...Almost 10.000 people are now being paid without working in these warehouses... There are millions of unemployed people in this country that will work for the wages of the 4-c"* (Direnişçi, 6:37). That reasoning aims to replace the previously mentioned tension between expectation and deprivation with a new one and expresses the wish to redefine the wages and rights of the workers, as well as the socioeconomic section they will eventually belong to. The ideology employed here has neoliberal qualities (Koray, 2015). The minister of treasury at the time also speaks in a similar manner: *"We are not wasting away our people's money in luxury. We built a model where no one will be at a disadvantage. If there is a mistake, it comes from our sense of mercy"* (Direnişçi, 7:47). That statement also comes from a wish to redefine the social status of the worker, and to replace a relation of right with a whimsical, hierarchal one (Çelik, 2015).

The impact of these factors, however, fails to have a regressive effect, and instead causes a progressive ideological effect that can be seen in the following expressions: *"Mr. Erdoğan says we get paid lying down. We did not lie down, he put us down. He is the one who stopped production...He is the one who ended tekeli shops. He is the one who ran us out of business...there is our right that had been earned...We will not give up on that; there is no way we will"* (Tekel 51, Episode 1, 6:48); *"I served these men... for years. Now he is saying that these are not from AKP, these are marginal groups. He is right, we are marginal for having served... I will no longer have anything to do with them. Completely—in fact, I will have nothing to do with the right anymore; they turned me into a communist by force"* (Tekel 51, Episode 3, 1:03); *"For 20 years we worked with our rights and benefits, we don't need anyone's mercy"* (Direnişçi, 7:58). The lack of regression in these attempts of verbal intervention makes more sense if it is taken within the ideological framing of the union members. As apparent in expressions such as *"We believed, and we won. The justice in this country accepted our right and our law; I hope the administration will too"* (Direnişçi, 0:12) and *"To rip the worker away from the union...to de-unionize the workers... We did not allow it; we will not allow it"* (Direnişçi, 32:49), the tendency to define the relation of right against the political power may have also served to feed the ideological effect. The expressions at this stage carry the institutional effect along with the ideological one, but this effect is regressive, not progressive. In other words, this effect causes expressions of class experience to appear not in the civilized stage, but in the ambiguous one.

The institutional effect can be considered as an effect that places the subject within group bonds and improve—or block—egalitarian group relations. With an effect that blocks egalitarian identifications, the expressions that fall under this cluster can be defined as the intensification of investing in hierarchical others, while withdrawing the psychological investing done in an equal other. Here, the institutional effect can be implemented both by *existent* factors such as state violence (either through illegalization or by other threats of violence), or by *missing* factors such as the social and egalitarian functions that cannot be

accessed institutionally through the union or through other means. Some of the statements made in the early days of the resistance such as *“Well, the worst was the tear gas, the sewage water, the torturing. That was absolute torture. It was a show of strength to stand up to that and to resist. We became stronger after that”* (Direnişçi, 1:29), and *“We first thought that if this was what it was, it wasn’t that bad. It turns out that was a little exercise. A day later we experienced things that were more nightmarish. Then we took refuge in Türk-İş”* (2:27) reveal what happened through the return of the “nightmarish.” The documentary shows us the violence in the most naked form (Direnişçi, 1:14). The threat of violence can be detected in the prime minister’s answer to a question on the police intervention: *“These are not legal applications, but we tolerate them for now. We are not expecting [police intervention] until the end of the month, but we will when that time comes”* (Direnişçi, 20:35). The news channel CNN Türk defines the strike and protest of the Tekel resistance as *“the protests deemed illegal by the Ankara governor”* (Direnişçi, 30:32).

State violence keeps alive the anxiety of being persecuted that underlies the expressions of this cluster. The disintegrating, regressive, and individualizing effect of violence can also feed on the lack of new relations and safe zones, and on the incapability of creating them. For instance, when the prime minister refers to unemployment in his statement, it points towards the state’s inability to provide social security. This is an institutional shortcoming. The head of Tek Gıda union, Mustafa Türkel, also signals an institutional shortcoming in his words: *“You can look at the February 4th incident in two ways. First off, it was the first time the worker stopped working for solidarity, for reasons outside of their own. When you do a general evaluation, you see that the February 4th solidarity strike did not bring the expected results. ... on the contrary, we witnessed the existence of union members who wanted this struggle to fail”* (Direnişçi, 27:35). Therefore, it can be said that both progressive ideological effects and regressive institutional ones (on levels such as the state, law, social security system, unions, workers movement) give way to expressions that appear at the ambiguous stage of class.

C. The Civilized Stage of Class and Institutional, Memory Effects

The psychological signs of proletarianization in the expressions of class experience do not have to rely solely on hierarchical identifications with dominant elements. This proletarianization can also rely on identifications formed with objects in equal positions, such as fellow workers as well as on realizing a difference in power with dominant elements and the subsequent struggle with them. According to Wood (2008a), this is what defines class as a relation: class is both a relation of mutuality, and one of contradiction.

Klein (1957/ 2016) connects the transition from paranoid-schizoid to the depressive via the abandonment of the other’s perception as part of the ego and via the synthesis between the good and bad. In the period of mourning, Klein suggests that following the early-stage fantasies and experiences such as

enthusiastic identification, fall of the object, the desire to overthrow the object, and the intense guilt from that desire, it becomes acceptable that the ego and the objects are imperfect (Klein, 1935/2008). The acceptance of the limits of and differences between the subjects and their flawed nature has an important place as the child comes out of narcissistic identification, idealization, intense destructiveness, and destructive anxieties. Freud, too, draws a connection between sibling identifications, the limitation of absolute authority, and the abandonment of identifying with it (1913/2014). In fact, to him, civilization relies on identifications over common thoughts, unifications against singular interest, and forming a sense of solidarity (1930/2011). In that context, the civilized expressions of class come from the contradiction against singular interest and whimsical obstruction, from the abandonment of identifying with authority and the desire of overcoming dependency—but not from denying it through identifications with omnipotent positions.

Workers form class by identifying with each other through a mutual recognition of realities (for instance, ‘circumstances of existence rely on the obligations forced by the market’ [Wood, 2003] and ‘the conflict of interest between the exploiter and the exploited is a necessity of the existence of capitalism’ [Marx, 1867/ 2015]), through the interpretation of experiences, and by forming groups and institutions on common contracts. In this context, class is something like “work groups,” which Bion (1961/2004) refers to, forming common ideals and connecting over the investments into those ideals; these connections provide an environment for creativity.

At this stage, we can take the primary insecurity experience as experienced through the *anxiety of lacking, of being deprived*. The exploiters (and state) exist by seizing, and it is not only possible, but obligatory, that they would want more. The group, however, can resist together, and limit the act and desire of seizure through regulations and law. According to Özyıldırım (2018), Freud’s idea of “the law of the father” highlights the democratic and egalitarian tendency of the siblings. In Marcuse’s (1968/2016) argument, that tendency is never carried out to completion due to the replacement of father figures and the preservation of guilt. Wood (2011) argues that for social relations to be organized without capitalism, intervention by the working class is structurally and strategically indispensable. At the civilized stage, the workers construct themselves in a differentiated, common, and antagonized position, but they lack the designs to destroy class relation itself.

Expressions that follow as referring to the construction of a group story can be taken at this stage: “*We got stronger after going through that. As you know, we are here to protect the future of our children. We will be... for the sake of the future of this country*” (Direnişçi, 1:29); “*This was a slow burn formation, good things began here*” (Direnişçi, 2:27); “*We became a family here*” (Direnişçi, 5:59); “*We stayed up through the night without our friends of struggle...we united in our labor*” (Direnişçi, 12:37). Expressions which, while designing commonization, possess both a desire to activate, and the recognition of the other’s desire to seize also have roots in egalitarian identifications: “*There is a just struggle here*” (Direnişçi, 7:17), “*We are right, and we will take what’s our*

right. This won't be just for us, but for sub-contractors as well" (Direnişçi, 7:37), *"We don't need any mercy. We worked with the same rights and benefits for 20 years, with no need of anyone's mercy... What they want is a cheap slave, a nation dependent on them—let me hit them on the head, give them a bag of coal, pasta, keep them dependent on me"* (Direnişçi, 7:58), *"He is the one who left us unemployed. We have rights that we earned. We won't give them up. We won't"* (Tekel 51, Episode 1, 6:48). As opposed to the previous stages, these expressions possess an understanding of rights that has not been curbed; the power which belongs to those which the struggle is against is not a source of excessive fear. Power, instead, is what prevents the use of right and deprives the person of fulfillment; the one exercising that power is no longer elusive, but understandable and recognizable in the eye of the worker.

Expressions that refer to workers sharing emotions with each other rather than with the dominant forces also fall into this cluster. These emotions can be of deprivation, of hope and of separation: *"We are living in unhealthy conditions, we are away from our families, but we have hope in the decision of the court, and we have hope in the struggle of our friends"* (Direnişçi, 10:32). They can also be of loss: *"They called me on the 14th-15th day to tell me that my daughter is sick. I went there, and I lost her on the third day. I came here for their future. I lost my daughter, and I don't want to lose my son"* (Direnişçi, 15:55); *"We lived that sorrow, and we mourned. But we had to resist"* (Direnişçi, 17:00). What is being shared can also be desperation: *"We told him not to go... He did. A friend came over and told us that he had an accident. We began to run; we were shocked; we couldn't do anything. We saw how painful helplessness can be here, we saw that here"* (Direnişçi, 37:56). Of reviving anger: *"We were a small spark, now we are a strong flame. We will burn those who wish to burn us"* (Direnişçi, 35:36); or *"Our rights, we will take them by force"* (Direnişçi, 11:49). Of gusto: *"We won a victory, my boy...keep up the struggle"* (Direnişçi, 40:43); *"I am very happy, I am very happy. It's been a struggle of honor and the honorable ones won"* (Direnişçi, 0:35) and *"We are right. We will win."*

The exchange of emotions can be seen in the farewells and embraces of the final day, as well in the crying and laughing (Direnişçi, 40:04). All these emotions are considered as shared between "siblings" and bringing them together, thus they can be placed within egalitarian relation designs. When we look at the news report on CNN Türk, which delivered, *"A sad event occurred on the 72th day. A Tekel worker crossing the street was hit by a car and lost his life. Hamdullah Uysal lost his life near the workers' tents, but police did not allow his coffin to be placed in front of Türk İş"* (Direnişçi, 37:23), we can see how sharing a common feeling can indicate a separation from the dominant element. The desire to claim the loss, the emotions, memories, and relations can be experienced as a struggle against the other, which intends to seize and to oppress.

We mentioned the difference in power when we talked about the relation that egalitarian identifications have with the acceptance of difference, but at this stage, what is also accepted is the difference between equals. In the expressions *"It's very hard to be a woman in the east; you are born into struggle. We fought that war. We came here after we overcame that difficulty. We lived through great*

difficulties when we first began working here, about 21 years ago, but we overcame those as well. We came to Ankara and learned to live on the streets. We joined the sitting protest for days, on the streets, with my daughter. My daughter was a resister too” (Direnişçi, 9:46), and *“Here, we experienced an environment where people come from all regions, live with their identities and their cultures, shoulder to shoulder. Not even the smallest issue came out. Everyone lived together seeing the other as the other”* (Direnişçi, 32:12), we can see the idea that no contradiction exists between being “from the east,” “a woman,” “an identity,” or “a culture” and being a group. The relation of recognition and encompassing as reflected in these thoughts and in the dances of “halay” and “horona” in the footage (Direnişçi, 32:40) also defines the matured, fully formed working class: Class is a group process that neither isolates the pieces by disconnecting them, nor pressures them into conformity. As is apparent in the statements *“We can make some gains here, or make none at all, but the winner will be Turkey’s working class”* (Direnişçi, 21:27) and *“Every place is Tekel, every place is resistance!”* (Direnişçi, 10:17), class contains the tendency to expand towards different people and places.

Expressions which reflect identifications expanding towards different workers’ sections can also be studied here, such as these words spoken about a group of workers shoveling snow at the resistance: *“I pity their state, they are laborers like us... They have children”* (Direnişçi, 13:12). The slogans shouted by a European group and the slogan of *“We will win by uniting and uniting”* (Direnişçi, 17:33) that was shouted following them are indicative of the bonds that have been formed. Another indication of that bond can be seen in the lines *“Your friends, comrades, are supporting you in protest from across Europe”* and the following *“Long live class solidarity!”* (Direnişçi, 17:53). Here is group formation among different workers’ groups—Tekel workers and supporters—as a way of forming groups among workers based on mutual feelings, experiences and stories. Identifications within the group that are based on shared experiences have expanded to the outside of the current group via similar identifications connected to laboring.

In that context, the class experience that becomes material to mutuality is, at one instance, pain, laboring and delivering and feeding children, and, at another, it is the struggle. Activities such as marching, waiting, staying up all night, conversing, singing folk songs, watching films etc. (Direnişçi, 0:01; 24:08; 35:36, 41:46) are based on egalitarian identifications. It must be noted here, though, that this interpretation does not overlook various other types of identifications that occur during these activities, but only indicates the necessary ones that enable them.

Two effects occur during the emergence of expressions of class experience at the civilized stage. The first one is the ***institutional effect***, and this time around, it has a progressive nature. At this stage, the institutional effect that enables egalitarian relations between workers and thus place them within a group can also be coming from the intermediary factor of the union (Tek Gıda İş) and the confederation (Türk İş). We note the following statement from the workers in the documentary, *“We thought, if this is what it is, it is not that hard. But this*

turned out to be a little exercise. We experienced much worse, nightmarish things a day after. We took refuge in Türk İş after that” (Direnişçi, 2:27) as well as the statements from the head of the confederation to which the workers took refuge: *“We will see our strength, that comes from production, between 8 AM and 5 PM on February 4”* (Direnişçi, 23:57), and *“Dear Prime Minister please, come here, and see this place. If you are saying that unions are not being honest, then come here once and show the grace of listening to the Tekel worker one. I call on the government on this day of protest, resolve this issue”* (Direnişçi, 28:28).

We also witness statements from the union head: *The justice in this country accepted our right and our law; I hope the administration will too*” (Direnişçi, 0:12); *““You can look at the February 4th incident in two ways. First off, it was the first time the worker stopped working for solidarity, for reasons outside of their own. When you do a general evaluation, you see that the February 4th solidarity strike did not bring the expected results. ... on the contrary, we witnessed the existence of union members who wanted this struggle to fail”* (Direnişçi, 27:35); *“We did not and will not allow the de-unionization of workers”* (Direnişçi, 32:40); *“In a minute, from noon, we will discuss these with our friends here and remove the tents at 1 PM. We end the mutual tent protest at 3 PM”* (Direnişçi, 40:48). Based on these statements, we can say the clustering discourse of the union and the confederation (this is not to say that these discourses are not in interaction with the workers, or are free of their impact), and the way in which the agenda is set, followed, and kept alive; the movement between workers and the state, their ability to make decisions and to pass them on—all constitute the institutional effect over the class experience of the Tekel workers. But these effects exist with the institutional effect from the workers’ actions. The active and “official” (Direnişçi, 15:15), day and night, sun and sleet, “tent city” (Direnişçi, 5:54) life the workers built at the site of resistance can also be taken as a mediating factor implementing an institutional effect over the connections of the workers. This life functions as the cradle of affections, designs, actions, and struggles based on egalitarian identifications. The cradle is kept alive through supporting sections and the support that contributes to the institutional effect, referred to in these expressions: *“We had beautiful friendships, people we never knew came to support us. We saw support in levels we never hoped for. That was great. From every section...they came to support us”* (Direnişçi, 5:12); *“This is no longer a Tekel protest. Global press, global unions, mass organizations are all with us. It makes one very proud. The world heard our voice, hopefully, so did Tayyip Erdoğan”* (Direnişçi, 18:10); (written on a sign) *“Thanks to the people of Ankara and the shopkeepers of Sakarya for their support”*; (directed at the shopkeepers) *“The workers are proud of you”* (Direnişçi, 43:24).

The memory effect accompanies the institutional effect of these mediating factors, but for expressions on this stage that effect is regressive; the memory effect here is missing and filled with gaps. The *memory effect* is what either integrates the historical, egalitarian, and democratic aspects of social relations into memory, or what partially saves and erases them. Within the context of Cluster C, civilized appearances, no matter how much they rest on egalitarian

identifications and stand on the potential place to overcome hierarchical social relations, do not contain designs of dismantling and restructuring hierarchical relations. This cluster is, after all, on the line of proletarianization; therefore civilized representations of primary insecurity are somehow lacking. The memory effect here is marked with forgetting and carries an *antidemocratic* quality.

One of the mediating factors that cause this effect is the limitation of the relation between the workers and the supporters to a “supportive” one—be it with a workers group from Europe (Direnişçi, 17:33), workers from a different sector such as firefighters (Direnişçi, 34:01), citizens (Direnişçi, 42:33), or other groups. We can see from previous expressions that these relations are perceived as supportive relations and met with gratitude, happiness, and pride; this, among other factors, may have caused the Tekel resistance to remain in a civilized stage. In other words, one can see the impact of memory gaps in the failure of these relations to enable designing egalitarian orders together and mutually. Further discussion can focus on how the opposite can be made possible—including the needed capacities of other groups. It must be noted here, however, that the documentaries lack definitive information on what the Tekel workers learn from supportive groups (on struggle and building new lives)—we will talk about the only example of that kind in Cluster D.

As we discussed, the union and the confederation, which have a certain impact on the workers’ experiences, lack the capacity to carry over the democratic memory of social relations and thus have a simultaneously regressive effect. This can be seen in the consent towards the union’s decision, or in the statements of the union head: the workers are experiencing the union’s decision as “news.” This constitutes an example of the workers experiencing the union in an external manner. Even though that experience can be overcome through the internalization of democratic memory, and the absorption of memory to relations, that has not occurred here.

D. The Symbolic-Ethical Stage of Class and the Memory Effect

The final stage of class formation is built on the symbolization of class experience in a way that indicates the overcoming of capitalist relations and its transformation into a new ethical framework. In other words, the symbolic-ethical feelings, designs, and actions formed at this stage are the signs and the potential of class and capitalism breaking down. Delving further into what situations enable the actualization of this potential is outside the focus of this article; however, the development of potentials is a prerequisite of social transformation. These potentials are formed through the subjectification of the primary insecurity experience, and its absorption into the psyche—similar to the absorption and subjectification, as Rousillon (2017) indicates, through symbolizations, of the traumatic experiences that fail to integrate into the psyche. The symbolization process tells the story of the “traumatic.” Through Thompson’s point of view (1995), the workers discover themselves as a class in

this story; but through Lucaks' point of view (2014), this story is beyond class identity and motivates the destruction of capitalist relations and class itself. This experience, which carries the tendency to unify history with the present—and future, by logic—, can also be considered as Holloway's (2011b) re-unification of the capitalism-induced separation between foundation and existence.

Class does not interpret its experience solely through the effect of elements that are at proximity, but also through the relations that enable these effects and it keeps the formation of these relations within its field of vision, intending to transform them. Therefore, expressions of class experience emerging at this stage, despite their roots in egalitarian identifications, develop beyond the thought of "proletarianization," by connecting to the idea of belonging to the group, or society. Identifications expand beyond the workers' group, accompanied by the desire to render subjects equal, thus, carrying the tendency to resist proletarianism. As class resists proletarianization through designs that redefine the relations that create class itself, it also turns towards expanding the fraternity to a wider section of the society. In line with Marcuse' (1968/2016) argument that Freud's sibling democracy was interrupted by the designation of the "father" figure, we can say that this stage exists beyond that interruption and carries qualities that are beyond civilization.

At this stage, primary insecurity is experienced as *an ethical anxiety* that forces a reframing of relations. Starting from Levinas, Butler (2013) talks about an ethical anxiety that is beyond the circle of conscience based in the cruelty of the superego, where banned aggression towards the other is replaced with aggression towards the self. According to Butler, that anxiety reveals the vulnerability of the other in a way that overcomes the narcissistic qualities of a guilty conscience. Butler states that the process of identification carries by obligation a perception of differences, and the tendency to overcome that difference. It separates the identifications based on the belief that the difference can be overcome by the connection tendencies that accept the impossibility of overcoming. The indicated "critical image" represents the latter type of tendency. Therefore, the phenomena in this last stage of class comes from the critical images of class. Class becomes an object of identification that is formed through the recognition of differences and the renewal of ethical contracts, where the need exists to create relations that do not place pressure on differences.

When we look at the Tekel resistance through the documentaries, we see the symbolic-ethical stage of class in the following expressions: "*Well, we started on this road to protect our rights and benefits, but people learnt a lot of things in this university-like tent city. Our struggle goes on in this country...so that our children, grandchildren can be saved from these troubling working conditions*" (Tekel 51, 1:37). There is a story being told here: In a place that turned out different than expected, with relations built that are not what had been expected, where motivation and ideas that existed early-on, but were then dropped, the vividness of relations between people and generations became more attractive. There is no change in the line of egalitarian identification, but the reference made to the image of a public space, where different classes,

generations, experiences, and types of knowledge interact,¹³ does indicate an expansion and enrichment of identifications. What is referenced here is beyond a relation of support; it is a relation of learning.

On the other hand, the dream of overcoming proletarianism and uniting in an egalitarian space (students can become equals among themselves or the teacher can realize how much there is to learn from students) is qualitatively different from resistance on the basis of hierarchical identifications. At this stage, the ambiguous tendencies that, under cluster B assign excessive power to the authority, transform into designing new relations for those in the place of authority and those who lack power. The university can be considered as a place of relations that differ from a high school or a company. Of course, here, we preserve the parallel associations with the source indicated in the footnote: At the university, students are adults; and the authority must reorder anytime it puts on oppressive or pacifying qualities. In that regard, the worker seeing the place of resistance as a university calls for the restructuring of relations in that place in a manner that leaves behind the state of proletarianism. This singular example also redefines occupation: occupying a city space also constitutes a form of realization of the resistance to proletarianization at the stage of egalitarian identification. As the occupation continues, it takes on qualities beyond defending rights. We must consider here both the malfunctions it creates on the social order and the “novelties” that come from the relations the person living there builds with him or herself, with the space, with others and with labor. The workers then create an organism that builds and processes these novelties—in other words, they create *a livingness that forms in a collective body*. We can see the anxieties related to the scattering of this body (Direnişçi, 41:02) as not only a sense of defenselessness, but maybe of losing the “psyche.” In objecting to ending the protest, you can also detect the anxiety over the irreplaceability of this “psyche” being voiced. You can’t find a similar example in the documentaries, like that of the “university,” which verbalizes that aspect of the occupation. Therefore, in a continuing protest of symbolic-ethical quality, there is a discrepancy in its meaning and that meaning’s verbalization.

There is a progressive *memory effect* that gives way to the emergence of this cluster’s expressions. This memory effect, compatible with the fact that it’s intensified in clusters B and C, may not be very strong and that may prevent the open development and multiplication of revolutionary designs. Still, the Tekel resistance has aspects that go beyond civilized experiences and these aspects have come from the impact of certain mediating factors. One of the reasons behind the workers’ identification with egalitarian memory is the worker experiencing the life and creativity of the collective body, which is created as a response to the insistence on unsafe work and police aggressiveness. In that case, the intermediary factor is the unity itself. What makes the worker think of a university and what keeps the protest going, is that body.

¹³ Many of the statements made by Boğaziçi University Academicians can be seen as supporting this association, but this one particularly does: <https://www.evrensel.net/haber/437210/bogazici-universitesi-akademisyenleri-kimse-bizi-evimizden-koparamaz>

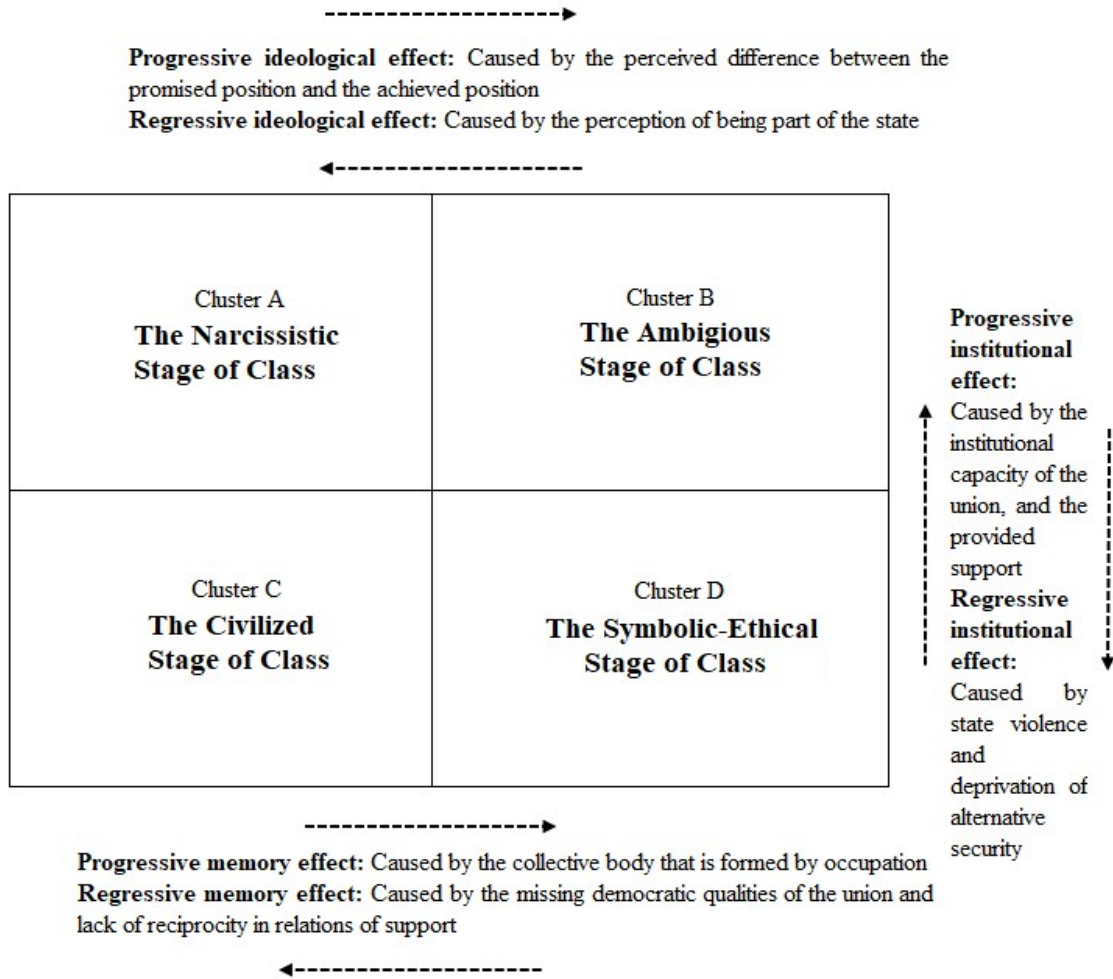


Table 2

Further deductions

The approach presented here aims to study the unconscious dimensions of class formation- deformation within the framework of relations to conscious appearances. It also relies on a specific model to relate expressions of class experience produced under various contexts to unconscious identifications and thoughts and to the interaction of those identifications and thoughts with the effect of individual or social factors. The model employed allows for ideas on the positions and states that can be found en route from proletarianism to discarding capitalism. While introducing this model, my attempt here has been to construct interpretations, through the Tekel Resistance, on both the psychological dynamics and the effects that create those dynamics (for a visualized representation see Table 2). Though they may not reflect all aspects of the resistance, I believe that the documentaries that have been referred to throughout this study have enriched these interpretations by forcing us to reconsider the resistance through what has been visible and by providing us with new material.

To further study the June 15-16 Resistance (Gürsel, 2020), I used the conceptualization of triple effects (ideological, institutional and memory), which I argue follow each other along class formation. In fact, I now consider these effects as conceptual parts of the model, and through this text, I tried to better define their meaning. The effects help us better understand the reflections and operations of the “inside”—the formation of evasive defenses and what it takes to put into motion the transformative symbolization—independent of our preexisting notions of what those factors are. Here, we form the relations between our chosen factors and these effects, and thus move beyond treating these factors as “independent variables.” For these factors are included in the game as *dependent*—only through the level of effect they are capable of and through how they themselves are affected.

Jumping off from this notion of effect-factor, we studied the table of identifications present at the Tekel Resistance. Our study shows: A strong ideological effect has been preserved through the resistance; an attempt to bring meaning and position, in struggle with neoliberal ideology, has been in effect, which we can see in the limited lapses into the narcissistic stage. But the same ideological effect remains strong because the ambiguous stage presents an intensification similar to that of the civilized stage. This indicates that the ideological effect did not transform into other effects and in certain ways stayed as it was. The untransformed ideological aspects may have rendered the resistance more vulnerable to regressions. Discussions into that vulnerability can benefit from looking into other examples, as well as looking into what happened after the resistance ended. These discussions may develop further through questioning whether the workers lapsed into narcissistic appearances and identifications with state, labor and proletarianism, the level of these lapses, or what occurred instead of them in the aftermath of the resistance.

We can detect the strength of an institutional effect beyond an ideological one in the accumulation at the civilized stage. The institutional effect that has been riddled with certain acts of forgetting—which is needed initially to form a group—and which levels the workers with each other in manners of emotion, thought, action and organization, can also carry reflections outside of the group. The legal gains¹⁴ can be an example of these reflections. On other hand, the resistance might have institutional effects as well. For instance, it can be further discussed whether the Union Power Unity Platform¹⁵—which was formed the following year by Türk İş member unions under the banner of “We united for a democratic, struggling, strong and new union”—can be seen as an example of the union struggle being civilized through the impact of the resistance. Perhaps the resistance affected in a similar manner those who came in contact with it. TODAP and PEP’s institutionalization can also be considered in this framework, and others may be added. In my view, the fact that these groups have communized the class experience of those that they contacted and unified their

¹⁴ For the state council decision: <https://sendika.org/2010/03/danistay-tekel-iscisi-lehine-karar-verdi-41219/>. For the gains/demands that can be considered as additions to the struggle against the subcontractor: <http://www.tkss.org.tr/yeni-khk-yayinlandi-4-c-tarih-oldu-71.html>

¹⁵ For further information: <https://www.tekgida.org.tr/sendikal-guc-birligi-platformu-atagi-12485/>

own class perspective at the time should be taken as some of the civilized traces of the resistance. This is a contribution to the egalitarian reminiscences of social memory; it should not be overlooked that the relations these pieces have (laws, groups, institution) to each other and to the Tekel Resistance appear to have been forgotten.

It now makes sense to delve into a discussion on the memory effect. As previously mentioned, the memory effect is not strong in the Tekel Resistance: even though the appearances belonging to symbolic-ethical stages were noteworthy, they fail to transform into clear appearances of a post-capitalism society. The partial forgetfulness that defined the civilized expressions were not replaced with something else. This could also mean that the collective body was not collectivized enough to multiply the mutually creative designs. In other words, this collective has yet to find the basis of relations (the university) it needs to form strong identifications with the egalitarian history of the society and therefore failed to multiply expressions beyond the civilized stage.

As we are discussing this, we must investigate the relations between the resisting workers and those that show up to support them. To say that these relations stay at the level they do because the workers, or others, have defined them as “supportive” would be to present what we hope to explain as an explanation. In my opinion, the difference between the capacity of those who are “supporters” to take on, internalize, and carry institutional effect has kept this relation from further collectivization. That difference may have presented an obstacle between the flow of experience and memory between various sections. The communizing effects that the supporters -whether they have come by themselves or as groups or they have shown their support from far away- have designed in their own living and organizational spaces are at best insufficient, which has prevented the forming of a mutuality in that relation. This could have resulted in some people or groups compensating for those insufficiencies or to continue the state of avoidance/forgetfulness. Therefore, what a resistance of the past can teach us—as we dream of being rid of capitalism—is far from over.

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Modalities of agency: How ultimate concerns and conduct of life frame biographical research

Michalis Christodoulou

Abstract

Traditionally social theorizing on agency suffers from the shortcomings either of the teleological models of social action stemming from rational actor theories or of the normative theories of action as proposed by Parsons. Psychological theorizing on agency is dominated from cognitive or developmental approaches which conceive of individuals as spectators of social life who process cues from the external environment. Criticisms to both kinds of theorizing underline the need that sociality needs to be considered in order that problems concerning determinism or voluntarism to be avoided. In this chapter we argue that Critical Psychology (CP) and Critical Realism (CR) might be two viable alternatives to the above strands of thought by bringing to light how these two theoretical currents approach agency. In particular, we show how CP scholars prioritize a subject-oriented in which the possibilities of action are highlighted and how CR scholars emphasize how subjects' being-in-the-world gives shape to ultimate concerns through which they navigate in the world. Both approaches theorize three dimensions of self-formation which are missing from the traditional theories of agency, namely, temporality, historicity and contextuality.

Keywords

agency, reflexivity, ultimate concerns, conduct of life, action possibilities

Introduction

Numerous attempts have been made to overcome the shortcomings/weaknesses/limitations of the agency/structure dualism, one of the main intellectual traditions that social theory inherited from Enlightenment philosophers. As is well known from the Anglo-Saxon literature on social theory which revolves around self-formation, the two dominant theoretical "camps" on the issue of agency are the rational action theories which end up in what is called analytic sociology and explains agency through mechanisms located at the individual level of belief formation and the constructivist approaches which

conceive of the world as a gift of society, as Archer puts it. Standard psychological approaches to agency consider it as an individual trait which acts as a motive pushing agents to actively influence their environment (Bandura, 2006). The deficiency of this approach is that agentic action is an internal affair limited to how cognitive schemes process environmental cues and that context, although considered as a “factor”, is not theorized as an integrative property of agency itself. This deficiency is reflected on the methodological level since agency is operationalized as a variable-centered effect of which the variation is described by these trait-like constructs (Judge et al., 2002). What is lost from this approach is not only contextuality but also temporality, relationality (Meyer & Ronald, 2006), and historicity (Parker, 2020). This article aims to put forward some theorizing which center on contextuality, temporality, and relationality as the main dimensions framing agency. We will delve into these issues as depicted in the points of theoretical and methodological intersections between Critical Psychology (CP) and Critical Realist (CR) approaches to the study of agency in biographical research. We have structured the article as follows: first, we highlight their socio-ontological commonalities regarding the genesis of self-consciousness, second, we bring to the fore the theoretical gains issuing from these commonalities which feed specific theoretical approaches to agentic action and, finally, we show the methodological orientations which frame the biographical study of agency in sociological research by presenting biographical material analyzed through the lens of CP and CR. Developing theory from a handful of cases is an additional common methodological perspective shared by these two approaches which are discussed in the last section.

Socio-ontological approaches of CP and CR to agency formation

A common feature, that both approaches to agency share, is that they do not reduce subjectivity either to rational action theories or to transcendental structures the foundation of which is a-historical. Tolman (1994, p.26) mentions the criticism on phenomenology put forward by Holzkamp who argues that it is history and society which impose limits to the subject's intentionality (Doise, 2012) and that by prioritizing indeterminacy, phenomenology does not theorize possibility-relations which are built up on social contexts. In contrast to this mode of approaching agency, Tolman sets at the center of theorizing the idea that thinking is necessarily subject to the logic of the capitalist social formation and that consciousness emerges out of particular modes of economic and social exchanges. The most intriguing consequence of this simple idea is that “consciousness remains not only shaped by the economic form; it remains unaware that it is thus shaped, with the result that it spontaneously and unconsciously reproduces it” (Tolman, 1994, p.48). According to this line of thought, any theorizing about subjectivity and agency must be critical in the sense that it must take into account how bourgeois contradictions create modes of agency that reproduce them or, under specific conditions, transform them. The most important methodological consequence stemming from remaining mute to

the historical formation of the subject is that the end result of most survey research designs are mere statistical descriptions of observable regularities without theoretical elaborations or developments as to how agency works.

CP scholars propose relationality as the main theoretical category for making sense of human beings as living organisms (Tolman, 1991). Relationality here refers to the fact that one of the essential features of human beings is that they require interaction in order to preserve themselves, and ultimately to reproduce themselves. Tolman uses the word *metabolism* for describing the creation of living organisms' properties generated through their interaction with the environment. Psyche is borne of this process and its function is composed of (1) orientation and meaning; (2) emotionality and need; (3) communication and social structures; and (4) modifiability, learning, and individual development. Humans learn gradually to orient themselves in relation to the environment by selecting among environmental properties through which (selection) the capacity of responding in various ways to differing units of objective meaning emerges. In that way, human beings know from the start that meanings must be considered as both actual and potential (Holzkamp, 1991a). Living organisms' emotions are developed by anticipating how the external objects would behave in case they acted in one way or another. In that sense, human emotionality emerges out of this preparedness for action, and this explains why it is action in context through which emotions evolve, not "cognitions" (Holzkamp, 1991b). It follows that anticipation which takes place as a reflexive process in the form of internal dialogue is the basis for the creation of motives in so far as motives concern how past habits interact with future expectations so that present decisions can be taken. It is within this framework that one should make sense of social life.

At the social level, what the individual confronts is neither the natural world in itself nor even the natural world mediated by the actions of others, but the world as a structure of meanings. Humans approach the external world as something which contains possibilities of action which are made sense of, through this structure (Holzkamp-Osterkamp, 1991). The individual thus comes to relate consciously to societal action possibilities, and consequently also to relate as a first person to others in their societal relations by making use of his/her reflexive powers. Tolman insists on the importance of distinguishing between a first-person and a third-person perspective, which is between the self as knower and the object known. By relying on this distinction, the individual becomes the center of the intentionality exactly because of the epistemic distance separating the two. In contrast to the constructivist version of self-formation according to which the mind is conflated with the world because of the language through which the mind becomes socially constructed, Tolman underlines the fact that self-awareness emerges only on condition that there exists a reality independent of what humans believe of it and it is this independence which fuels humans' reflexivity about their action possibilities. As Tolman puts it

If we live in a possibility relation to the world, we must have alternatives with respect to the action taken, or even whether we act or not. There must exist for any instance the possibility of having acted otherwise. It is this condition that

lends a peculiarly human sense to words like choice and freedom. (Tolman, 1994, p.110)

According to this view, relationality means possibilities for action upon which humans reflect and this, in turn, makes it feasible for the individual to plan and anticipate particular outcomes of his or her courses of action. Life plans and decisions are not free-floated moves of the individual, but they emerge out of the dialectical relation to the opportunity structure within which his/her natal world is lived as taken for granted. This life situation, as Tolman calls it, is composed of the house we live in, the people with whom we live, work, and play, the stores in which we shop, etc. It is, in short, the immediate world in which we find our satisfactions, frustrations, amusements and the spatial-temporal expression of the overall societal structure and process of which we are a part. The modes of consciousness which emerge from such life situations sometimes entail self-deception and self-hostility or tend to make individuals who live in a marginalized or dominated position to identify their interest with those of the dominant groups. The role of the unconscious and of ideology is crucial at this point but, given that these issues have been covered satisfactorily by other scholars (Parker, 2020), I will not analyze them further. What is important to note here, however, concerns the fact that human beings in their natural attitude fail to grasp the whole social conditioning which precedes them or to control the full range of the social mechanisms which have shaped their preferences, needs, and desires. This is a socio-ontological idea to which both CP and CR subscribe and of which the origin is to be found not to some old-fashioned deterministic philosophies of science but to the pioneers of documentary and biographical research, William I. Thomas and Florian Znaniecki who wrote *The Polish Peasant in Europe and America*:

Indeed, the individual's sphere of practical acquaintance with social reality, however vast it may be as compared with that of others, is always limited and constitutes only a small part of the whole complexity of social facts. It usually extends over only one society, often over only one class of this society; this we may call the exterior limitation. In addition, there is an interior limitation, still more important, due to the fact that among all the experiences which the individual meets within the sphere of his social life a large, perhaps the larger, part is left unheeded (ignored, forgotten), never becoming a basis of common-sense generalizations. This selection of experiences is the result of individual temperament on the one hand and of individual interest on the other. In any case, whether temperamental inclinations or practical considerations operate, the selection is subjective—that is, valid only for this particular individual in this particular social position—and thereby it is quite different from, and incommensurable with, the selection which a scientist would make in face of the same body of data from an objective, impersonal viewpoint. (Thomas & Znaniecki, 1918–20/1927, p.5)

What we have mentioned up to this point bears striking similarities with the socio-ontological ideas of CR. Given the numerous articles which have been written on the issue, I will briefly present those aspects which intersect with the

socio-ontological ideas of CP. CR is a philosophy of social science which has received considerable attention in the last 20 years. Most of the work has been done in the field of social ontology and epistemology of social science and particularly in clarifying what are the distinguishing features of a CR position regarding social research. The most popular socio-ontological idea of CR is the iceberg metaphor of social reality. While in most epistemological traditions (Hermeneutics, phenomenology, positivism) social reality is flat, for CR reality is stratified, which means that it is one thing how humans make sense of reality (the Level of Experience), it is another thing the Events in which they live their lives (the Level of Actual) and it is quite another the causal powers which make events to take place (the Real Level). For CR thinkers, social phenomena are composed of entities the nature of which is stratified. Entities are composed of lower-level parts the peculiar relation of which gives rise to novel and unpredictable emergent higher-level properties. Within this stratified social ontology, the entity on one level may be seen as part of another level. In that sense, entities can be conceived as wholes, the emergent powers of which are not the end-product of an additive process because a possible replacement of a part will not affect an entity's properties (Christodoulou, 2021). What matters is the relation among the parts and the configuration it takes in time, and this explains why emergent properties are not possessed by each separate part. Emergent properties of the form of the relation are quite dissimilar from the resultant properties possessed by each part even if they are not related to each other. Emergent properties correspond to how entities' internal parts have been relationally formed and have the power to affect them causally (Tsiolis & Christodoulou, 2021; Donati & Archer, 2015; Elder-Vass, 2005, 2010). In this stratified social ontology, relations matter because they highlight the fact that ontological levels are not disconnected. On the contrary, the relation is the medium for explaining both the emergent properties of the whole and how its parts are affected. This means that the source of the emergence is tied up with how the parts are connected and with the maintenance of the form of their relation. Emergence is relationally defined by Archer as follows:

Emergent properties are therefore relational: they are not contained in the elements themselves, but could not exist apart from them . . . The highest orders of emergence are nothing more than the relations between the results of interaction. Nevertheless these “feed-back” to condition subsequent interaction at lower levels (Archer, 1982, p. 475, cited in Elder-Vass, 2007, p.26)

The approach to self-formation CR scholars offer is based on this concept of emergence. Archer's conceptualization of agency offers a powerful perspective for grasping the complexities of how emergence intermingles with agency. In contradistinction to both rational action theories and Hermeneutics, Archer makes sense of the genesis of self-consciousness as a pre-linguistic process that is deployed while human beings act within the life world and come to terms with its objects. The order of practice and embodiment takes priority over the order of discourse for the development of personal identity, which means that the sense of self precedes sociality (Archer, 2003:121). For CR thinkers, the relation between

nature and nurture should be conceived of as a continuum, not as a discontinuity or a gap, as phenomenologists suggest. Archer draws upon the work of Merleau-Ponty to support the idea that self-consciousness is a pre-linguistic matter by arguing that our primary experience of the world is like an undifferentiated reality, a unity. Self-consciousness starts to take shape while human beings transact with the world for satisfying such needs as hunger or thirst. It is the experience itself which sets the stage for realizing that there exists a reality independent of my perceptions of it. Powerlessness (that the kid's hands cannot reach the toy cars on top of the table) and the fact that the objects resist my desires (I cannot eat a stone) are what give shape to the limits which separate the mind from the world. The sense of self does not have to wait for the discursive capacity in order to be formed. Hence, the sense of self is a monological process which entails practical concepts structured through our embodied engagement with the world. It is not the Cartesian cogito that provides access to the world but the sense-motorial potentialities of the body and its practical capacities (Archer, 2000: 82-95). Within this line of thought, Archer prioritizes emotions as a cornerstone dimension for the genesis of agency. Agency is an emergent property of the sense of self to the extent that emotions are nothing but comments upon human concerns. Emotions emerge in relation to how humans are engaged with the order of nature, the order of practice and the order of discourse. Emotions, in that sense, transform the main concern which corresponds to these three orders of reality (see also Demertzis, 2020). In the order of reality, the main concern has to do with self-maintenance, the main concern in the order of practice has to do with the skillful adjustment to the objects of material culture and the main concern in the order of discourse has to do with self-esteem. Given that it is impossible to summarize successfully all of the subtleties of Archer's work, what needs to be underlined here is that reflexivity is not a property of the order of discourse but it is already at work in the order of nature (when humans try to deal with the concern of self-maintenance) when, for example, human beings start to fear by anticipating what are the consequences of touching the fire, and in the order of practice (when humans try to grapple with the artifacts) when, by remembering a past achievement, they hope that they will skillfully do it again. In other words, emotions emerge out of the interaction between the real or the imagined existence of an event and the concern of a human being. For Archer, emotions, as emergent comments, provide information which could be proved to be wrong, sometimes make us not see the good things in a situation which is bad and could be controlled as a result of human's self-reflection. In that sense, emotions are moral guides for leading a life of which the foundation is the internal conversation. Archer has delineated three stages of this reflexive process, discernment, deliberation, and dedication (Archer, 2000, pp.99-117).

Discernment is the reflective process upon the question "how much do I care about living a life by putting in action the X life project (for example, to start a family, to stay young, become a vegan, or write books)?" The function of this stage is that it facilitates individuals to discern the things they care about by separating the pleasant from the unpleasant and sets in motion the second stage, that of deliberation. In this second stage individuals are called to answer such

questions as “how much do you care about X” or “how determined are you to pursue this plan?” so that the main concerns can be compared and organized. In the third stage, individuals start to form personal judgments about the things they care about the most and the things they will dedicate themselves to. What we have mentioned up to this point explains why Archer says that personal identities are not only different from social identities but more fundamental for making sense of people’s life decisions throughout their biographical transitions. In addition, of crucial importance is the fact that humans’ internal dialogue (self-reflexivity) has to be conceived of as a real causal power since it is through this power that they take decisions when they face the necessities of their life world. Our decisions have causal effects on the external world, either its reproduction or its transformation. Whether transformation or reproduction prevails depends on how individuals’ ultimate concerns (the things they care about) are formed. Archer’s contribution at this point needs careful examination because it is important in order to understand the modalities of agency. She argues that individuals’ ultimate concerns take shape in conjunction with whether their natal experiences have been experienced as relational goods or relational evils. Keeping in mind that for CR thinkers, social relations should not be reduced to mere “interpersonal relations”, relational goods refer to individuals’ bonds and interdependencies at the empirical level amongst the persons who populate their natal environment. Love, reliance, caring and trust related to individuals’ natal experiences are some of these goods which are evaluated as crucial for leading their life. Respect for relational goods means the endorsement of the family’s *modus vivendi* which appear to work as a consensual norm circle. On the opposite side, relational “evil” or harm refers to natal experiences of domination, antagonism, maternal dependency or domination, coercion, and exploitation. In other words, the quality of familial relations gives shape to various forms of decision making and of selecting life projects not in an automatic or unidirectional way on the part of individuals but through internal conversation which fuels various modalities of agency.

Theorizing agency for biographical research

From what we have said up to now it seems that relationality, self-reflexivity, possibility relations, action potentials, and ultimate concerns constitute the common ground of the socio-ontological framework of CP and CR for making sense of agency. These commonalities, in turn, provide theoretical guidelines for carrying out biographical research through similar points of view. In this section, we present the details of these guidelines. For both CP and CR, individuals live by taking part in social practices – not by their own efforts alone. Recognizing that individuals are participants in social practices means that one must conceptualize individuals as participants in social relations. For Holzkamp (2016, p.70) this conceptualization is termed as *conduct of life*, a term which tries to frame how people lead their life in various social circles or domains of life. Leading a life is an active effort carried out by people who try to integrate the

various “demands” from the respective domains of daily life. The conduct of life must be understood as a mediating category between the subject and societal structures and concerns the scope for action that subjects have as they grapple with these structures. Understanding the conduct of life from the standpoint of the subject means that researchers should focus on the mediating level of people’s reasons for action to deal with everyday life demands to identify the mechanisms which explain whether reproduction (morphostasis in CR terminology) or transformation (morphogenesis in CR terminology) occurs and the details of their modalities of agency which emerge from this dealing with the external demands. The life-world people live in provides them with meaning constellations from which they extract certain premises for action that they adopt as theirs. The intentions to act arise from these constellations and are experienced as sensible in the sense that it is in people’s interest to act according with them (Holzkamp, 2016, p.87).

Holzkamp’s argument at this point bears striking similarities with Archer’s approach to the temporal dimension of social conditioning of which the formation has been made in a temporal frame before the one in which people face external demands in the present. He says that the general aspects of an existing meaning constellation people extract as their personal premises for action, depend on the historically evolved generalized possibilities for and/or restrictions on action themselves that are “objectified” in the respective concrete meaning constellation (Holzkamp, 2016, p.89). In addition, selection and choice depend on people’s interests in life, in which the grounds for their actions are rooted. This also implies that they do not have unlimited options, since such alternative actions that are not compatible with their interest in maintaining or increasing their influence on societal conditions and/or their quality of life, are excluded from the start for “psychological” reasons. The “interest in maintaining or increasing their influence on societal conditions and/or their quality of life” is the most crucial point of intersection with Archer’s theory on how ultimate concerns fuel the modalities of agency. What kind of thing is this “interest” and what are its determinants? For Holzkamp interest has a “material a priori” in so far as

Our actions can be at variance with our objective interests in life but not with ... our interests in life as we experience them as our situation. The statement that human beings cannot consciously harm themselves contains so-to-speak the only material apriori of the ‘science from the standpoint of the subject’. (Holzkamp, 2016, p.90)

However, according to this line of reasoning, it seems that Holzkamp conflates two different issues, the degrees of freedom involved in cases where sometimes people may consciously act against their interests in life and the possibility relations from which the end result is reproduction or transformation. He seems as if he does not have an answer to a question he poses “what reasons I could have for nonetheless contenting myself with the option of acting in accordance with the prevailing conditions and thereby forgoing an increase in my quality of life” (Holzkamp, 2016, p.91). Archer’s theory provides a comprehensive answer

to this question, that is to the question of how to theorize these possibilities of action (or action potentials), by offering a detailed account on the interplay between a) how agents define and dovetail their ultimate concerns as they have emerged out of their relational goods/evils, b) how they start to develop concrete courses of action (projects) and c) how they manage to establish satisfying and sustainable practices. It is from this interplay that researchers could identify the morphostatic or morphogenetic consequences of agentic action. Let me summarize how this takes place.

Even though humans' reflexivity is causally effective, the impact of this efficacy depends upon what Archer calls "contextual continuity, discontinuity or incongruity", from the pertinence of which four modalities of reflexivity and agency arise. Or to put it in Archer's terms, the mode of reflexivity from which specific modes of agency prevail, is the product of the interplay between people's nascent 'concerns' (the importance of what they care about) and their 'context' (the continuity or discontinuity of their social environment). Contextual continuity refers to the continuity which exist between the life contexts of parental concerns and that of the individual, or, between the natal concerns and the ultimate concerns of the individual. In such cases, the individual shares all his/her contextual references like "history and biography, unchanging geography, familiarity with the same schools, hospitals, churches, factories, employers, pubs, buildings, and a common fund of anecdotes, idioms and local knowledge" with his acquaintances (Archer, 2007, pp. 25-40). Whenever this situational logic prevails, the communicational mode of reflexivity takes shape. Communicative reflexivity means that people's internal dialogue is completed when others give their assurance and only then a line of action is implemented. In that sense, trust and respect are fundamental for whatever decision is to be taken without this meaning that individuals are mere copy-paste versions of their parents. As Archer puts it, "reproduction entails innovative action" because individuals must deliberate upon the means for staying close to their natal concerns or upon how to adjust them to their own life context. However, communicative reflexives run the risk that without external consultation, their internal conversations would revolve inconclusively.

This external reliance ends up in a mistrustful dismissiveness about private mental deliberations. This leads, in turn, to a growing uncertainty as far as decision taking is concerned. In other words, when individuals are imbued with this modality of reflexivity their agency is blocked and is based upon similar others in order to navigate the world. Obviously, in such cases, the non-intended effect is social reproduction to the extent that individuals which are communicatively reflexive (or *identifiers*) tend to embrace their natal *modus vivendi* as their own or as something they would live their life by. In any case, Archer repeatedly underlines that this mode of reflexivity is decreasing in our times for various socio-structural reasons and this is what differentiates Bourdieu's time in which social reproduction was the dominant mode of society's function. In contrast, contextual discontinuity and incongruity is the dominant route through which young people today come to forge their ultimate

concerns and to develop agentic action (Archer, 2003, pp. 45-60; Archer, 2007, pp.82-96).

In particular, Archer describes as autonomous reflexives those who deliberate according to an instrumental rationality style of thinking and try to craft their own agendas as far as their occupational prospects are concerned. The internal dialogue in these people presents a kind of self-sufficiency that fuels their courses of action. Autonomous reflexive people (*independents*) are the inverse of the previous mode of reflexivity since they act by being based on their own cognitive resources and powers, not on others' affirmation. When they are faced with problematic situations, they make use of these powers to deal with them by experimenting with innovative practices. The cost of deliberating independently is the time these people spend organizing their course of action on their own terms. This makes them have no difficulty in coming to decisions since their form of selectivity is not distracted by reservations or self-interrogations. Most of the time, these people have experienced contextual incongruity in the sense that their natal backgrounds reflected the absence of relational goods rather than the presence of relational evils. Absence means that the parental orientation towards the children is not characterized by the preservation of the common good of the parental relation as a couple but by the fact that two individuals try to parent a child.

Contextual incongruity is a term Archer attributes to this style of parenting in which parents are more preoccupied with themselves and not with the well-being of the family relationship. This is why a high form of selectivity is the distinguishing marker of autonomous reflexives in so far as selection is what emerges when one distances him/herself from the initial context of involuntary placement (Archer, 2003, pp. 71-80; Archer, 2007, pp.111-1213). As a consequence, contextual transformation rather than replication frames their modality of agency because in most cases in their puberty they have assumed domestic responsibilities which are usually associated with adult roles, and they do not have any particular bond with the geographical area in which they have grown up. Archer argues that the lives of "autonomous reflexives" were considerably eventful due to the mobility they experienced which made them inaugurate new cycles of internal conversation. Even though most of the features concerning the third modality of reflexivity and agency according to Archer, the meta-reflexives resemble those of the autonomous reflexive, there are some striking differences between them. Although they do not search for the affirmation of similar others regarding their decisions, as autonomous reflexives do, meta-reflexives engage in a great deal of self-monitoring thinking regarding their everyday life and their life plans. These acts of self-monitoring have emerged out of the disengaging stance against their natal backgrounds.

This stance is not identical with the independence of the autonomous reflexive but is more like the "loner" who deploys an exploratory outlook towards the social. While contextual incongruity sustains the ultimate concerns of the autonomous reflexives, meta-reflexives' ultimate concerns have been shaped through contextual discontinuity. This means that while they are dissatisfied with the familial *modus vivendi*, as it happened with the autonomous

reflexives, meta-reflexives are permeated by a critical detachment against the individualism which framed their parents' orientation towards the family bond. While autonomous reflexives tended to adopt various elements of the *modus vivendi* from one of their parents which provided them with the means for selecting careers that fell within the same spectrum as those of their parents, in contrast, meta-reflexives tend to be *disengaged* from the individualism prevailed in their family contexts and to evaluate it negatively. This is why meta-reflexives develop a vocational stance towards their career plans and values, as Archer puts it. While autonomous reflexives tend to be more instrumental regarding occupational plans, meta-reflexives are characterized by the importance they attach to living up to an ideal, to the internal goods of work, and to listing a value-commitment amongst their main concerns in life. Value commitments entail perfectionism on the part of meta-reflexive subjects who strive for a self-transcendence and a social transcendence that would enable them to do more and thus better realize their ideals. This explains why in most cases they have a deep concern for the underclass, the oppressed, and the globally deprived. Their stance regarding structure and culture is full of tension because neither social arrangements nor the institutions or organizations to which they are vocationally drawn approximate their ideal. This is what makes them social critics. This is why the disengaged have the greatest difficulties, during their life course, in completing the sequence, "concerns → projects → practices", and in defining a satisfying and sustainable *modus vivendi* over the long term. Note that meta-reflexives exhibit a high form of selectivity even if their familial *modus vivendi* offers them relational goods, which underlines the fact that this modality of reflexivity gives shape to a modality of agency characterized by a disengaging stance from the family *roman* as a whole.

Hence their restless volatility. Meta-reflexives are idealists ever seeking a better fit between who they seek to be and a social environment that permits their expression of it (Archer, 2003, pp. 131-158; Archer, 2007, pp.204-226).

There are specific and insightful implications for biographical research from the abovementioned presentation of Archer's and CP's theorization of agency. What is common to these approaches has to do with the prioritization of the active cultural agent in the socializing process since agents' reflexive powers make them apply their own values to the present and future circumstances, that is, to contexts that increasingly do not replicate those of the parental generation. This means that the subjects examine and selectively accept and accentuate the values transmitted to them. The conduct of everyday life – as the concept proposed by Karin Jurczyk, G. Günter Voß & Margit Wehrich (2016) describes – focused on the ambivalent way and the discrete creative efforts made by subjects to develop their own ultimate concerns. In addition, both approaches do not view early socialization as the exclusive source of an individual's value commitment for the rest of his or her life.

Unpredictable contingencies issuing from the open system that is society can undermine whatever socialization processes are underway. The importance of these contingent interventions for a subject's subsequent life history can significantly modify or completely override family influences (this applies only

to the disengaged and the independent modalities of reflexivity, according to Archer, not to the identifiers). Unpredictable or chance events such as striking experiences, illnesses, medical conditions, or geographical relocation are usually responsible for subverting the normativity of subjects in a particular direction or for initiating a radical selection process within a set of values, one in which some elements are discarded and others are reinterpreted. Karin Jurczyk, G. Günter Voß & Margit Weihrich (2016) applied this line of reasoning to the field of precarious and flexible work by collecting biographical interviews from the fields of journalism, care for the elderly, retail, and industrial work. They relied on the abovementioned concept of “conduct of everyday life” as a framework for analysis by using it as a sensitizing concept. In particular, the conduct of everyday life concerns the structure of the activities that are part of life on an everyday basis and is characterized by the ways in which people position themselves in relation to the various social spheres to which they refer. It is a system of action that integrates the various activities in which people are engaged and it is invariably actively constructed, as well as adapted, when necessary, to changing conditions by every person with reference to their individual social situation or position. According to this conceptualization, the conduct of everyday life should not be taken as a substitute for voluntarism but as a way for taking into consideration the more or less inflexible constraints and demands faced by the individual as they are actively appropriated by him/her through his/her life conduct. The theoretical fruit of this research application is what is called typological theorizing, that is configurations of conditions each of which combines specific variables of theoretical interest in each of which (configuration) specific cases fall. For instance, the life conduct of the journalists concerns balancing acts in order to secure themselves against irregular working hours, expectations of mobility, insecure income conditions, and high intrinsic motivation to work without the guarantee of a return. Four such types of balancing acts were identified, the “control” type, the “discipline” type, the “acrobatics” type, and the “trust” type each of which presents different ways of practicing agency in unpredictable working conditions. However, the researchers did not stop their work with the identification of the types as they emerged from the interviews. They moved to theory development. By re-working the sub-types in comparison with the sub-types from the rest of the interviews obtained from the other fields of work, the researchers elaborated a theoretical formulation for dealing with how the modernization of society affects the increasing rationalization of life conduct. As a result, the ideal types of traditional, strategic, and situational life conduct emerged (Jurczyk, Günter, & Weihrich, 2016, pp.40-3). By using a terminology from the Grounded Theory toolbox, this research exemplifies how one can generate new knowledge on a substantive area (how people deal with precarious jobs), not through blind inductivism but by using interchangeably induction, deduction, and abduction as inferential strategies, by elaborating on the scope conditions of the theoretical concept “conduct of everyday life” and on the explanatory power it provides for the cases which fall within this scope. In the next section, we illustrate an application of the theorizing of agency to biographical research material by elaborating on the

methodological implications related to how one can combine these three modes of inference when conducting biographical research.

How temporality frames agency in a longitudinal framework

Below we present three biographical interviews from a research project which took place in 2020 in traditional working-class neighbourhoods of Piraeus and West Attica (Greece) and aimed to identify the determinants of agentic action by asking how an emergent property connected to social relations (work precarity) shapes a subjective situation (vulnerability) connected to decision making¹. By drawing upon a mixed method design (cross-sectional research and biographical interviews (for methodological details see Christodoulou et al, 2022)) we tried to unpack how job trajectories affect the life decisions of the residents of this area. In order to reduce the amount of the collected data, we made use of two conceptually defined axes. The first derives from the work of Archer on the modalities of agency we presented in the previous section and the second has been formed inductively by emerging from the material. In particular, the first axis is a continuum ranging from contextual continuity (1) to contextual discontinuity (-1) and the second is a continuum ranging from conditions of material possession (1) to conditions of material dis-possession (-1). Then, by studying the collected material intensively through Schutze's (1987) and Rosenthal's (2018) principles of analysis, we distributed the biographical interviews to the four quadrivia each of which constitutes a combination of the intersection of these two variables of interest (scheme 1). Three things deserve our attention:

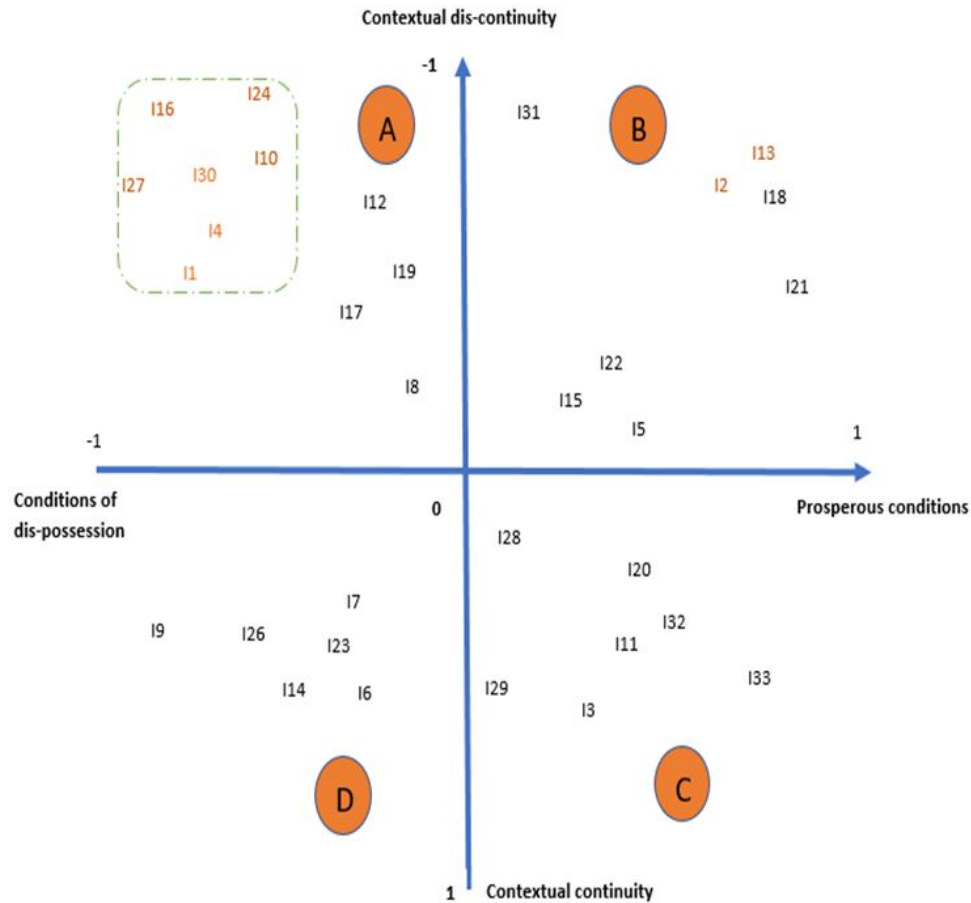
First, we observe that most of the cases fall into quadrivium A composed of the combination of contextual dis-continuity with conditions of dis-possession and that all of these cases concern vulnerable people (brown color).

Second, there are two “deviant cases” in the sense that I13 and I2 (I refers to “informant”) are vulnerable persons even though they have been raised in favorable material conditions.

There are no vulnerable people in quadrivia C and D.

In the following pages, we briefly analyze these two deviant cases in order to highlight the specific mechanisms through which theory development may be produced, by considering Archer's and Jurczyk, Günter, & Weihrich's theorizing of agency. The point we want to underline here is that the outcome (vulnerability) is produced through two different combinations of conditions within which peculiar mechanisms are developed and not through separate variables which act as difference-makers.

¹ In particular, it concerns a research project titled “Cultural conditions in the formation of class identities: culture and working class in Piraeus and Thriasion”, funded by the OP Human Resources Development, Training and Lifelong Learning 2014–2020 and monitored by the University of the Peloponnese for the academic period 2020–2021, under the academic guidance of Professor Manos Spyridakis, University of the Peloponnese, Greece. Dr Panagiotis Koustenis, Dr Giorgos Bythimitris and Dr Michalis Christodoulou were also members of the research team.



Scheme 1. Distribution of interviewees to the four quadrium.

At the time of the interview (2020), I2 was 65 years old (born in 1954) and began his narrative as if he were an observer of his childhood who had a thorough knowledge of the neighborhood where he grew up.

Well, I was born here in (...), Piraeus, which was a newly built district, consisting mostly of refugees but also internal migrants. In other words, Piraeus in general is rather a mixture of refugees and migrants, mainly from '22. But at the same time, it also has extensive internal migration because of the port. So, let's say I grew up in an area that was a mixture of refugees- who were fewer than in other parts, though- because most of the refugees here in Piraeus moved to the edges of the city, to the left side of the city, i.e. Kokkinia, Nikaia, Drapetsona where refugees mainly reside. In my area, there were mainly islanders coming mostly from the Cyclades. I was already born and raised, which means that I got the chance to see it. It was a notorious district, it was difficult, there were vagrancy crimes, hashish, and a port. Petty thieves, you know, this whole thing about poverty let's say and the poor who worked more and they lived more in a slightly refugee situation, people who worked in the port, it's [...] like that, heavens and all that sort of thing.

Without the intervention of the researcher, I2 continues his narrative by referring to the financial collapse of the previous generation of his grandparents. His

father's father was a tobacco merchant, whose family, however, due to financial difficulties, was forced to move to Piraeus, and he became the owner of a boat that transported food from Crete, something that his father engaged in and later developed into a shipping business. That is why he presents his childhood not as if he grew up in a "working class" family and environment but rather in a more prosperous one with a relatively good standard of living.

We have had a maid at home ever since I can remember, these were mostly girls who used to come in those years, this one was brought by my father, yes, some orphan from Crete. She raised the kids, you know, did all the, the heavy chores. And I grew up in a house, in an environment that was pretty good. Private school, the first ones that were built then, the primary school I mean, primary school. The environment was very sheltered and very relaxed.

In Table 1 below, we depict his biographical transitions by using a timeline form so that a more complete picture of his decisions connected to his age and life period can be obtained. The informant wished to project his initiative when he consciously and despite his father's refusal manages to travel on a merchant ship and later, at 18, when he moves to England for maritime studies. During this period, he experiences a first condition of precariousness due to the fact that his father's shipping company collapses and there is no money to help him continue his studies; then the dissolution begins and there comes a very big disaster, a total disaster with periods of great hunger.

YEAR	AGE (at the time of the interview)	EVENTS	EDUCATION	JOB HISTORY	TURNING POINTS	MAIN THEMES
1954 birth date	66					“I am this kind of person because a lot of misfortunes happened to me”
1970	16	He starts working as a sailor with his father in a ship				
1973-1976	19-22		He travels to the United Kingdom to study ship technology	He works on a ship illegally in UK as an immigrant		
1976-1978	22-24	Army service				
1979	23			He works at his father's job (travel agency)		
1980 -1981	24-26			He works as a sailor for a limited period Works as an accountant at another travel agency (1 year),		
1982	27			He starts working as a bank employee offering ship loans	Due to ship financial crisis, he goes to another bank and becomes its union leader	
1992	37				He opens a bistro and a cafeteria	
1996	42				He sells the bistro and keeps the café for 15 years	
2009					He finds himself in debt due to the 2009 financial crisis	

Table 1. I2's timeline of biographical transitions

Chance events are particularly decisive in people's lives in the sense that they change a person's life trajectory. For I2, this chance event is his contact with a friend, from whose acquaintance he managed to switch to the banking sector and in particular to shipping loans.

I had a friend I hung out with, she was a shipping lawyer and she told me that at the American Express Bank they're asking, the manager is asking for an assistant in the shipping department, in the shipping loans. I tell her that she is a goddess, I do an interview and they hire me. And so, I enter a very good sector.

It is obvious that the transition to the bank marked for our informant the transition to another life, clearly better than the one he was living. After a year, however, due to economic circumstances which led parts of the shipping industry to bankruptcy, our informant is faced with a work impasse. The solution was provided by his manager from his previous job, who suggested that he become an employee in an American bank. This relocation seems to have ensured him greater financial comfort mainly or rather, thanks to the strong trade unionism of the time as from September 1982 onwards "we had more than doubled, not to mention almost tripled our payroll".

Agency itself does not explain much unless it is embedded in contexts and situations, one of which, as we show here, is the structure of chance events. As our informant's narrative flows, the emphasis is now on his transition into the business sector. Once again, this transition was determined by a chance meeting of our informant with someone he knew who suggested that they start a business in the catering sector.

And at some point, I had a friend who asked me if I wanted to help him find some job. I was looking to find something – the shop in Aegina closed – to find something here in Piraeus to set up a shop and so on. I really have a strong liking for–lots of things – but I really like industrial spaces, old industrial spaces. I have already been involved for a time in [...] here in the municipality of Piraeus where I had a good friend, the deputy mayor and we were organizing cultural events in such places [...] and he says to me, 'do you want to open the shop together?' I asked him to wait till I tally up; then I said that I would find this money that I had never had, but I promised I would find it.

This transition began in 1992, a time when the "opening" of banks to business lending had already begun and large sections of Greek society began to have access to mass consumption. This gave our informant the motivation to create a second business in the city center. This shop was with a partner but because things were very expensive,

I suddenly became a big owner and gained fame. And we opened the second one and the second one also took off and things were unimaginable... 'all hell broke loose'. You understand there was a second takeoff. All these within 2-3 years.

From 1992 onwards our informant has held both jobs (at the bank in the morning and at the companies in the evening) and in 1996-out of sheer weariness- he decided to look for ways to retire from the bank, but payment he got was extremely small and a portion of it was withheld for taxes. The gradual increase in rents combined with the crisis of 2008 led I2 to an accumulation of debts and a financial impasse with "the last blow, of course, being 2015 and the lockdown of banks; that was the final blow, but we were already on a serious downward spiral

of destruction." From 2008 when he closed his businesses for good until 2015, our informant had been working as a secretary in a cultural club so that he could top up some pension stamps. The intensity of his vulnerability is captured in the way he closes his narrative when he adds

I have lived a good life and now, within the last 5 years, I live a hunger regime. The shift is terrible, it is... no man can ever imagine that. I am telling you literally, it's not, you know, a manner of speech, it is unbelievable. How a society gets rid of whole parts. I mean totally expelled from society. And I was a man who has many friends, and acquaintances and social environment and, and, and.... I achieved nothing. Many disasters in a row, out of the blue. I have to admit- I think about it many times- I take risks, I like it, maybe I like to live a little riskily, so to speak, do you understand?

One could say that the extent of the biographical time of his life's rise is inversely proportional to the biographical time of his fall, in the sense that what he positively experienced in a thirty-year period was very quickly and violently reversed in a five-year period. Perhaps this uneven concentration in the layers of our informant's biographical time explains the intensity of disorganization that is reflected in the vulnerable state he experiences.

Agency is something that also characterizes the life decisions of informant 13 who (born in 1968) chose to differentiate himself from the expectations of his father who was a mathematician. Raised in an environment in which there was financial comfort, our informant was affected by the death of his father when he was 14 years old, as after this event he faced no reaction to his plans to pursue a career in theater and direction. The death of the father brought many financial problems to the family of the informant, who had to work for his pocket money while still already a teenager.

Since we were now in a very bad state financially, in relation to the past, when I was 17- 16, I went to work for the second time. When I was 15, I worked for the first time for a friend who had..., he did repairs on compasses and stuff like that to get pocket money. At 17 I went with an uncle from my father's side to (city location) and I first worked in a hotel, uh, as a waiter. Then I came back and worked there for three years in the summer season, so I gained a lot of experience at all levels. I had a very nice time and for my age, working during the summer months was just perfect. In the winter I worked here as a bartender or waiter; I worked in a lot of shops and at the age of 22 I decided to turn my father's summer house on the island into a shop which I kept for ten years.

In Table 2 we also present a timeline for I13 summarizing his biographical data.

YEAR	AGE (at the time of the interview)	EVENTS	EDUCATION	JOB HISTORY	TURNING POINTS	MAIN THEMES
1968 birth date	52					He defines himself as a "risky and uncompromising guy"
1983-1987	15-19		Completes high school	He works as a waiter		
1988-1998	20-30			He transforms his summerhouse into a small business		
2001	33				The drowning of his sister	
2002	34			He rents the small business in the island and returns to Athens in order to run a catering business		
2004	36	He meets his wife				
2006	38			He presents his theatrical performance		
2008 and 2012	40 and 44	He becomes a father of two children				
2016				He runs a real estate agency		

Although the informant entered the world of work quite early out of necessity, we observe that there was a financial resource (property) that he used in order to escape from uncertainty. Nevertheless, in this case, as well, the debts accumulated in a way that our informant could not manage, resulting in the vicious cycle of borrowing.

I fought it from the beginning, I took loans, I got out of debt, I also provided for the family...in the winter I worked here as well. I went through anxieties, okay, but I also had a very good time, that is, there may have been this financial pressure regarding the loans, their payment in full, and finding ways of investing in the shop, despite the fact that this shop never actually paid off.

While our previous informant presented a biographical self-understanding of the 'I am who I am because I've had a lot of setbacks' genre, Informant 13 often shifts his narrative to identify himself as 'risky' and 'nonconformist'. Hence his extensive references to his reluctance to get married or "commit", to his many soul-seeking trips to Asia, and to the fact that he also did drugs but did not get "hooked". The death of his sister, however, was a sudden event that made him

leave the life of a businessman and return to Athens to fulfill his desire to become a director.

He returns to Athens in 2000; for two years he works in an amusement park and at the same time attends a theater workshop. In 2002 he moves into organizing cultural activities/events together with an acquaintance he made at the workshop. He, then, manages to put on a theatrical show in 2006 but at the same time, the woman he was in a relationship with becomes pregnant. Nevertheless, he thought of it as a risk that someone takes when living with a person for 6 months.

Eh, we just weren't happy about it because at the same time when our first child was born, the financial crisis started. For us, I mean people in this line of work, this crisis was more obvious than for the rest of the people who did not realize it until later.

Financial resources, such as the property he had rented and some money he received from the shows he put on, were what allowed him to respond to the insecurities created by the financial crisis of 2008. But the collapse of the advertising company led to increasing debts and the creation of a vulnerable situation.

I also made the professional mistake of keeping the advertising company and its accounting books for emotional reasons, which was a mistake. This means I was charged with penalties and these are things I regret to this day. At that time, our second child was born and I was very happy on the one hand and very scared on the other.

A chance encounter with a friend from his teenage years, who suggests he join a real estate agency, an offer he accepts even though it is not something he relates to or ever thought he would do, seem to break the stalemate. Nevertheless, it is something that creates insecurity for him because he lives in a rented house, his wife does not have a stable job, the children's obligations are increasing and so are the debts from previous choices, resulting in a feeling of self-blame and failure.

Now I'm also worried about whether I'll get the rent from now on and how I'm going to get it. Another thing is the work I'm doing, which is somehow unstable. It is possible to make some good money one time, but not make anything the next or just make little money. The obligations have increased a lot, I confess that it is a period in my life that is probably one of the worst, not to say the worst, while I have been through a lot; well, this is something that worries me very much because I am... I am in so much debt; the day after tomorrow I am losing the arrangements I have made at the tax office for the third time, which means that the chase begins again, a chase that has lasted for about 15 years...banks included[...] my failure, in general, is rather professional, that is, where you sit yourself down, you admit your mistakes, you see the problems that are amplified and you face yourself. Those moments in the morning when I see myself in the mirror, I realize a lot of mistakes. I don't know if I have found a way to correct them, but I try

without having the same abilities as in the past; judging both from external and internal factors, I do not have the same endurance. I really don't know if it was worth it.

Theory development through case studies

Let me summarize the above findings by treating them as cases of agentic action of vulnerable people. We observed that the agency of these two deviant cases does not have to do with planning a future that is brought to the present in order to be realized in a subsequent time frame, but it has to do with a future the informants do not have at all. In that context, to the extent that agency concerns the attempt to get away from the uncertainty of the present, it follows that agency is more like an “instinct”, not like competence to plan the future. Obviously, instinct is used here for lack of a better term because it is shaped longitudinally, that is through temporal and relational conditions. This is in stark contrast to a conceptualization of agency in which agency is identified with the ability to plan the future, in a long-term perspective, intentionally, and in a stable way for a long time. In other words, planful competence, according to this approach, is an a-social attribute that affects agency (Brandstädter, 1984). In contrast to this approach, what our research brought to the fore is that agency is a praxeological issue shaped by the intersection of biographical temporality with social time in the sense that its meanings emerge through the social contexts in which agents develop their line of actions throughout their life course. Agency is neither a motive that preexists action pushing the people to act nor a medium that makes agents comply with class conditionings. We might hypothesize that this “instinctual” version of agency does not concern only adolescence and the school-to-work transition but it is a socially formed permanent stance against problematic situations which people face through their life course and that, instead of being treated as an emblem of fatalism, it could be seen as a version of optimism through which vulnerable people try to deal with the vicissitudes of the present.

This is testified by the willingness of the participants for risk-taking in order to actively counteract the uncertainty of their life. In other words, it is a mid or short-term optimism through which they attempt to not return to previous precarious conditions and to create spaces of security and living standards capable of protecting them from future social threats. A crucial dimension of this line of thought concerns the structure of chance events which are closely related to the modalities of agency. Our analysis showed that the implementation of the agentic action has not been affected by some permanent social networks created in the past, but it has been fueled by chance encounters with people who influenced the risk-taking habitus of the agents (Bouzanis and Kemp, 2019). Hence, we argue that the “instinctual” nature of agency as well as the structure of these chance events constitute two relational mechanisms or processes which are connected with making people vulnerable in a subsequent life period. Undoubtedly, we should note the role played by the form of social relations in

the temporal grounding of vulnerability. In particular, we observe that such practices as the involvement in trade unions, the participation in welfare structures and schemes or being part of a dense network are frameworks that give shape to agency. This means that one should not draw a direct line from class origin to the temporal grounding of temporality, or else, from past to the present and then to the future. In contrast, while agency is to some extent rooted in the past, what gives form to it concerns how the present, enacted as action potentials or possibility relations, makes possible the creation of a future capable of protecting people from precarious conditions of living. In that sense, it is preferable to talk about contexts of vulnerability framed by various modes of temporalities than about psychological traits which predispose those who are possessed by them to vulnerability.

Our analysis, we believe, provides Archer's modes of reflexivity with more depth and explanatory strength for the following reasons. A close reading of these two deviant cases (both of them raised with high standards of living) shows that they resemble the autonomous reflexive people since they have been involved in a high form of selectivity from their teen years in order to transform the relational goods of their natal contexts. We think they are not like the disengaged mode of agency because they exhibit an individualist stance, and they are not critically detached from their parents' ultimate concerns. Although these modes of agency promote social transformation during T1 life period, they end up in vulnerability during the T2 life period, which means that agency is not a psychological motive possessed by individuals but a relational property that is shaped through the intersection of biographical temporality and social time. Their chance encounters fueled a dis-equilibrium between the temporal horizon of the autonomous reflexivity and the social time of the financial environment. The social time of finance is full of sudden subversions and present-based while the temporal orientation of the autonomous reflexives is a risk-taking habitus and liable to experimentations with opportunism. In periods of huge financial crisis like the one that took place in Greece during the 2009-2018 period, the action potentials enacted by independents may undermine this mode of agency. In other words, we believe that Archer's theory of agentic action could profit if tested in cases other than the university students of Warwick because researchers could explore the temporal grounding of autonomous (or disengaged) reflexives in a longitudinal research design. To frame it with the Grounded Theory terminology, we could say that Archer's approach to agency is a substantive theory applied to university students and that it could be transformed into a formal theory in the case that more comparison groups are taken into consideration. Similarly, the concept of "conduct of life" put forward by CP scholars may be enriched by discovering new dimensions in the four types of the balancing acts each of which presents different ways of practicing agency in unpredictable working conditions by comparing them to the "extreme" cases of huge financial crisis which occurred in Greece in the 200-2019 period.

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The teaching of written language in Brazil: Between the limits of precariousness and emancipation challenges

Adriana de Fatima Franco, Fernando Wolff Mendonça & Lígia Márcia Martins

Abstract

This text analyzes, within the framework of Historical-Cultural Psychology, the issue of the formation of alienated consciousness in the literacy policy proposed by the Brazilian government (2018-2022). Emphasized in the mechanistic relationship of the methodological procedures offered for teacher training and, for the student, the emptying of meaning in learning written language. To do this, we refer to the concept of written language in Historical Cultural Theory and the need for developmental teaching, in order to criticize the current educational model. In proposing to overcome the model proposed in Brazil, we understand that the concept of humanization through the appropriation of written language as a complex symbolic system originating from the most elaborate forms of human activity is necessary. To this end, we will revisit the authors involved in the constitution of the relationships between teaching activity (Vygotsky, Leontiev and Davidov) and learning activity (Vygotsky, Leontiev, Luria and Davidov) in order to analyze the documents produced by the neoliberal bias of the current proposal for teaching writing in public education. We point out the limitations and regressions of the proposed model and indicate the need for teaching (human action) that qualifies omnilateral educational practice.

Keywords

Teaching, written language, cultural history psychology

She also discovered that knowing how to read and sign her name was not enough. Another wisdom had to be learned from reading. She had to authorize the text of her life, just as she had to help build her origin's story (...). And realize that beneath the signature of her very fist, there were other letters and marks. (Evaristo, 2021, p. 110)

In Brazil, 2022 was the year in which we experienced the COVID-19 hangover, expressed in more than 660,000 deaths, accompanied by growing food insecurity and hunger risk, which affected about 36% of Brazilian families, according to research data by the Getúlio Vargas Foundation¹. The wave of destruction has advanced on the rights historically won by the working class, including labor and pension reforms, deepening the abyss of social inequality. In this scenario of death and destruction, the attacks on public, free, secular and quality education have intensified. Education, as we have been following, is one of the fields most attacked by the current government. Since 2018, the Ministry of Education (MEC) has undergone the passage of four (4) ministers, namely, Ricardo Vélez Rodrigues, Abram Weintraub, Carlos Alberto Decotelli and Milton Ribeiro. All of them were involved in polemics that touch on everything from technical capacity, close relations with religious groups, and allegations of embezzlement (Zimmermann & Cruz, 2022). The attacks can be noted at all educational levels, emphasizing cuts in resources and scholarships, university autonomy, high school reform, education militarization, and the National Book and Teaching Material Program (including early childhood education), among others. As if these events were not enough, the Chamber of Deputies intends to amend articles of educational laws to facilitate homeschooling outside the State's responsibility.

All this, led by the advance of extreme right-wing forces, neoliberal ideology, and obscurantism (named by Duarte (2018) 'bellicose obscurantism'), which concerns the "spread of an attitude of attack on knowledge and reason, of cultivating strongly aggressive attitudes against everything that might be considered threatening to conservative and prejudiced ideological positions" (Duarte 2018, p. 139). Duarte points out that the phenomenon is not new in the Brazilian scenario. Still, with the expansion of the virtual world, it presents some peculiarities, benefiting primarily from "fake news."

Regarding neoliberal ideals, we highlight the commodification of education and its transformation into a promising market niche. Considering the above, we wonder how psychology's contributions can help us understand today's scenario and assist in constructing a new project in the country. Specifically, what can the teaching of writing contribute to the foundations of historical-cultural psychology and historical-critical pedagogy in this process?

It is known that theories alone do not immediately interfere with concrete reality. However, the greater the degree of reliability with which they reflect said reality in the individuals' consciousness, the greater the possibility that they operate as essential mediators for effectively conscious actions, that is, for science-based actions on causal and teleological dimensions of typically human activity, which means to say: work. In our opinion, both historical-cultural

¹ For further information, please read FGV Social (2022).

psychology - in the realm of psychological sciences - and historical-critical pedagogy - in the sphere of pedagogical sciences - have managed to capture the movement of the real and represent it in the form of ideas, concepts and judgments, expanding, each in its field of interference, the possibilities for the fundamental intelligibility. Therein lie their most outstanding contributions.

This text does not intend to exhaust the analysis of all issues involved in teaching problem writing, but rather to seek elements that guide us to reflect on the current state of Brazilian education and the purposes for which we want the educational process to be directed. Therefore, the challenge posed to teach written language demands technical competence and political commitment to the working class (Saviani, 2011). Only then will the language domain be at the service of the dominated, who, possessing humanizing cultural contents, will be able to instrumentalize themselves for liberating actions from the condition of domination (Saviani, 2018).

We highlight that school cannot be understood apart from its relationship with society. We recognize that school knowledge is intersected by the contradictions generated by the class and the ideological struggle that accompanies it. Finally, we know that this movement for learning socialization in school in a capitalist society does not revolutionize society. Still, it can transform alienated social relations (Duarte, 2016).

This text is organized into two sections to develop the topic at hand. First, we present the educational policy aimed at teaching writing in the early years of literacy - embodied in the National Literacy Policy (Política Nacional de Alfabetização [PNA]) and its alliance with the process of the commodification of education. Second, we talk about the counter-hegemonic approach posited by us as an alternative to educational barbarism, represented by historical-cultural psychology and historical-critical pedagogy precepts, and emphasizing the process of writing appropriation.

Literacy policy, obscurantism and education commodification

From the outset, we announce that attacks on education are not exclusive to the current government. The reforms that are being put into practice were already underway since the Fernando Henrique Cardoso – FHC era (1995-2003), including the offer of financing to the private education sector in Luís Inácio Lula da Silva's and Dilma Rousseff's governments. They culminated in Michel Temer political reforms (2016-2019), after the parliamentary, legal and media coup against President Dilma Rousseff, who took care to take some measures that would facilitate, even more, the future work of Bolsonaro and Paulo Guedes, Minister of Finance and was responsible for the current economic organization (Souza, 2022, p. 178). Montes (2018), in his article published in the newspaper 'El País', under the title "The bonds of Paulo Guedes with the 'Chicago Boys' of Pinochet's Chile" (Los lazos de Paulo Guedes con los 'Chicago boys' de Augusto Pinochet), highlights the link between the Brazilian economy minister and ultraliberal models of Milton Friedman with the Chilean dictatorship. The

strongman of the Brazilian President Jair Bolsonaro, Guedes - and the president himself - always flirts with right-wing authoritarian models.

It is necessary to clarify these affiliations to understand the impacts of multilateral agreements on the history of educational policies in force over the last few years in Brazil. In 1990, the country entered a process of democratic opening after 30 years of military dictatorship. The new Brazilian constitutional charter pointed to what we call the 'Citizen Constitution,' where, for the first time, guarantees of education, health, and social security had obtained victories in their legal foundations.

However, conservative bases in the Brazilian legislature imposed intense pressure on the executive to expand its economic ties with developed nations. In this context, neoliberal ideas were taking their roots in the State reform promoted by financial guidelines issued by the Washington Consensus, as mentioned by Vaz and Merlo (2020). In education, they were removing the primary conditions for a humanizing education. We emphasize that the current setback in the educational area is enormous. However, we do not disregard the expressions of the class struggle present in the implementation of public policies, since the present guidelines leave no doubt about the type of person they intend to form, which is a person adapted to the prevailing model of society and trained to meet the capital dictates.

This fact finds its foundations in official documents such as the National Curricular Guidelines for Basic Education Teacher Training (*Diretrizes Curriculares Nacionais para a Formação de Professores da Educação Básica* [Brazil, CNE/CP. Opinion (09/2001], which presents the concept of "competencies" to teachers, for example in the National Literacy Policy (*Política Nacional de Alfabetização* [PNA]), which proposes literacy through the phonetic method, the National Book and Teaching Material Program, and "homeschooling" (Ministry of Education, 2001). In our perspective, these normative instruments are not loose lines or antagonistic proposals. On the contrary, they are aligned with the same political and ideological project, all articulated to combat knowledge, in which neo-liberal prescription and a fragmented and simplified conception of human development predominate. This combat, in turn, makes the terrain more fertile for obscurantism, for the acceptance of phenomena appearance and the denial of reality in its multiple determinations. When criticizing this model of education, Antunes (2009) highlights: "education in the era of financialized and flexible accumulation of today's (destructive) world of capital must be agile, flexible and lean, as capitalist companies are today" (p. 31). This political-pedagogical context directly impacts the teaching and appropriation of writing and, consequently, the psychological development of the individual.

We will place in the foreground the analysis of the training of Basic Education teachers, considering that Brazil's professionals are the ones who suffer the most from impacts arising from the pedagogical lightening of neoliberal reforms. These teachers are mostly under the tutelage of 5,600 municipalities that make up the Brazilian State (IBGE, 2021) and, in the last ten years, according to data brought by technical notes of the last School Census

(Censo Escolar [Brazil, IBGE, 2021]), suffer a stagnation in their careers, without improvements in salary conditions. Many teachers work three shifts (mornings, afternoons and evenings), in several different schools, in order to get paid for 40 hours of work, with precarious working conditions, and unstable possibilities for career advancement. Additionally, approximately 30% of teachers working in basic education, in which literacy is a core element, do not have specific training in pedagogical activities to teach reading and writing. Mendonça (2017) underscores that most of them started their primary school education after 1987, a period of significant transformation of Brazilian educational models. The author warns that in this period, collective work and the appropriation of historically systematized knowledge overlapped with the centrality of ‘individual know-how competencies’ that are anchored in Delors’ thesis,

The Commission considers educational policies a permanent process of knowledge enrichment and know-how, but also, perhaps primarily, as a privilege to build the person himself and relationships among individuals, groups and nations (Delors, 1998, p. 12).

Thus, we identify a gloomy scenario for a teaching career nowadays.

Another critical aspect Mendonça (2017) considers is the meritocratic and marketing link attributed to teachers’ continuing education. A large “educational products industry” transforms human knowledge into a commodity, and teachers’ access to any form of continuing education has to come from his or her income. A perverse exploitation of teachers’ work is created, where their work activity is moved out of their reach.

Currently, access to quality and free public education at universities is assured to a reduced number of students, with low impact on teacher training. For the great majority, all that is left to do is to use distance learning of dubious quality, offered in a precarious and fee-based way, to access their continuous study needs to keep up with challenges imposed by the pedagogical work in the current conjunctures or even to achieve a meager career progression. As if that were not enough, basic teacher training curricula suffer from the impoverishment of conceptual knowledge that has been replaced by practical teaching activities emptied of their theoretical foundations. Thus, the teacher ends up acting in literacy classes deprived of conceptual and didactic elements to support them.

Another of the most recent expressions of neoliberal ideology in primary education is materialized in the guidance booklet for the PNA, which was established through Decree 9,765 of 11 April 2019, and decreed by President of the Republic, Jair Messias Bolsonaro and the Minister of Education, at the time, Abraham Bragança de Vasconcelos Weintraub, through the Literacy Secretariat (Secretaria de Alfabetização [SEALF]), whose secretary is Carlos Francisco de Paula Nadalim (MEC, 2019). The PNA allowed programs to be created, with the premise of implementing programs and actions of the Federal Government in collaboration with federated entities. In the same year, courses were implemented, through the Avamec platform, aimed at Basic Education teachers and civil society, based on the new literacy policy, namely: “Science-Based

Literacy” (Alfabetização Baseada na Ciência) - 180 hours (2019); “Text Production Practices” (Práticas de Produção de Textos)- 120 hours (2019); “Literacy Practices” (Práticas de Alfabetização) - 30 hours. All the courses mentioned are part of the “Time to Learn” (Tempo de Aprender) program, approved in 2019. Besides, there was another implementation in the same year with a family literacy program, “Tell me” (Conta Pra Mim) (2019), targeted at Brazilian families (Almeida & Piatti, 2021).

The PNA carries in its core a series of noteworthy elements, such as the concept of science and school education, highly compatible with neoliberal prescription; the conception of human development, pointing to its naturalization, fragmentation and simplification; an understanding of oral and written language taken by themselves and separated from their multiple determinations, explaining a reductionist view on them - all of this expressed through an ideological discourse disguised as scientific, to highlight the theoretical-methodological incongruence between the National Curricular Common Base (Base Nacional Comum Curricular) implemented since 2011, with a constructivist bias, and the PNA, which is of a behavioral cognitivist nature. This fact reiterates the lack of a consistent and coherent theoretical-methodological ‘educational national system’ (Franco & Martins, 2021).

We also believe it is essential to mention that -although it mainly focuses on school education- the PNA does not cite any pedagogical theory that guides the teaching and learning process and does not seem to consider that pedagogy is the science of educational methods (Franco & Martins, 2021). On the other hand, it reaffirms the centrality of psychology in teaching and learning processes, presenting cognitive science and neuroscience as theoretical contributions to support these processes. With that, the document carries out a direct transposition from psychology to education, subordinating the second to the first. In line with this, the PNA highlights brain functioning as the core of the development of understanding and learning, as if the brain were its only determination. It should be noted that we do not disregard the role of biological processes for literacy acquisition. However, we are contrary to biologizing reductionism, when natural (organic) bases are placed at the center of the formation and development of a being, whose nature is social. By displacing the acquisition of reading and writing from educational and activity plans intentionally organized by the teacher to the child’s brain functioning, the document reiterates the naturalization of learning and, thus, may favor its pathologization and relegate the teaching process to a secondary position.

Another essential aspect of the PNA document concerns the reduction of literacy problems in the country to questions of literacy methodology. This debate and its limits are not new in our country and have already been addressed by Mortatti (2006, 2009). In this direction, the PNA document wants us to think that an innovative and supposedly neutral alternative to solve all literacy difficulties in the country would be the phonics method.

Although it is essential to consider the need for a language teaching method -since a child does not learn writing spontaneously-, in our perspective, the phonics method presents a superficial understanding of writing and reading,

approaching them as a technique or conditioning limited to associations between sounds, letters and syllables. The document omits that this type of teaching presents only rudiments of literacy, corroborating a lightened school education addressed at working-class children, which directs them from early childhood to training for, at best, the reproduction of the workforce. In Franco and Martins (2021) words,

By prioritizing the phonetic side and seconding the semantic aspect of the word, they limit the possibilities of this human objectification to operate as an instrument for understanding the world beyond its appearance and/or beyond the simple codification and decoding of graphic signs. (p. 85)

In our opinion, the core of this discussion is in the conception of language anchored in formal logic, which does not go beyond an analysis by elements. Science concepts, development, and language in the PNA pave the way for the insertion of schoolbook programs starting in early childhood education and for “homeschooling.”

The discussion about the Early Childhood Education textbook is not recent and dates to the 1980s. Authors like Nosella (1979) and Faria (1994) have already discussed its ideological function. Since its origin, the textbook has been in the service of directing teaching practice, but it has contributed little to the mediation of knowledge, especially at this educational level.

One last aspect of being considered that fits so well with the neo-liberal package for school education concerns homeschooling as it is under discussion in Congress. It seems to be no coincidence that the PNA does not include a specific item aimed at teacher training, but the document presents a sub-item directed to families concerning the education of children aged 0 to 6 years, called ‘Family Literacy (Literácia Familiar).’ It highlights the role of the family, pointing out that literacy success is strongly linked to the family environment, affirming the need to value early childhood, and stressing the family’s role in developing numerous skills.

Considering that only a trained person can deal with pedagogical issues, the document disregards the need for solid training for those teaching young children and, implicitly, paves the way for homeschooling. This time, it ends up transferring to individuals the educational responsibility that was once institutional and, at the same time, makes the school role secondary; these data meet the reduction of investments in Education in general and in Early Childhood Education in particular (Franco & Martins, 2021). It draws our attention that homeschooling, even in the legislation process, provokes demand from publishing companies that organize themselves to sell material kits for this purpose².

In our opinion, the issues we illustrate through the explanations about the PNA are representative of the political-ideological project that seeks to transform education (anti-commodity) into a service and commercial product (commodity) to fulfill the interests of different fractions of the business class, that is, to

² This news can be read in full at Bimbatti (2022).

radically commodify education (Martins & Pina, 2020). Against the grain of these economic-ideological aspirations and policies, we understand School Education as an institution (the school and pedagogical system) and as a practice (the act of educating), as a specifically human and historical-cultural practice implied in each vision of person, society and knowledge. Thus, we consider the need to go beyond the provisions of current policies, calling for constructing a public policy to transform education such that it makes human achievements available to all and contributes to building a free and universal human being. The alliance between historical-cultural psychology and historical-critical pedagogy is placed in service of this ideal.

Teaching writing with an approach of Historical-Cultural Psychology and Historical-Critical Pedagogy

In the previous section, we analyzed a general panorama of adversities imposed on school education by current political-ideological conditions that are expressed mainly in the national policy proposed for literacy. And it is precisely this scenario that has mobilized enlightened teachers and managers in search of alternatives, established resistance postures, and strengthened the call for a public school education of transition, able to resist the present and gestate another future. We must recognize that the class struggle is not cooling down, despite the mishaps that impose obstacles on it. In this scenario, historical-cultural psychology and historical-critical pedagogy, both based on historical-dialectical materialism and advocating a school education that promotes the omnilateral development of individuals, emerge as counter-hegemonic theoretical-methodological possibilities able to subsidize pedagogical practice.

Although significantly expanding their penetration spectrum in schools, such theories, for understandable reasons, have few expressions in teacher training, and when these expressions occur, their foundations are often subtracted. The gaps here are numerous; in this paper, we are particularly interested in those involved in teaching and learning reading and writing. According to Martins (2013), historical-cultural psychology provides psychological foundations for historical-critical pedagogical theory, considering that both approaches share the same conceptions of humans, society, knowledge formation and, notably, the role of appropriating signs in promoting psychological development. In his studies, Vygotsky (2003) stated that to educate is to transform; otherwise, education would be unnecessary. But for this to be effective, it is necessary to know what is required to change and into what. Therefore, not just any psychological and pedagogical theory allows us to advance, because it is not just any human being we intend to form.

Teaching and appropriation of writing analysis require clarity on pedagogical science that supports it; this will bring us an understanding of educational purposes, identification of school content, and didactic orientation of scholarly work. We agree with Abrantes (2015), when he asserts that assumptions of historical-critical pedagogy “are based on the perspective that

educational praxis fulfills the function of knowledge socialization and does not occur as an adaptive activity to capitalist production mode and alienated socialization forms” (p. 135).

Historical-critical pedagogy conceptualizes educational work as “the act of producing, directly and intentionally, in each singular individual, the humanity that is historically and collectively generated by men as a whole” (Saviani, 2011, p. 17). Still, according to Abrantes (2015), this concept of educational work represents a double orientation as it “offers direction to education workers in internal struggles in the educational field and points out principles that can only become effective with overcoming class society” (p. 136).

In this sense, Saviani (2004) defends teaching that places education in a revolutionary perspective, as an instrument of transformation for working-class children. In these terms, it is necessary to have an education that does not aim at conformation, but rather at transformation. This transformation necessarily passes through the educator’s philosophical training, given that education and teaching are central determinations for the formation of people’s consciences. We agree with Abrantes (2015) that it is necessary to “politicize the discussion on knowledge socialization and defend the position that disseminating the theoretical link with reality is an object of class struggle” (p. 130).

For success in constituting a child as a fully developed human being and, in this direction, for them to acquire reading and writing domains, the teacher needs solid training, since they are the bearer of the signs that mediate psychic development. The humanization process, being a cultural fact, requires the intervention of another human being who has appropriated the achievements produced by humanity (Martins, 2013).

With Mendonça (2017), we understand the professional teacher as a subject culturally created to ensure knowledge transmission produced by humanity. Consequently, the teacher must have a solid primary education to conduct their task. Their continuing education must guarantee the theoretical deepening of concepts and forms of teaching actions regarding socially produced knowledge that are relevant to collective life. In this way, teaching is dependent on the teacher’s actions. To perform this act with developmental intentionality, it is up to the teacher to scientifically appropriate the knowledge they will transmit and the means of conducting this transmission. After all, they must lead the new generations to access the most elaborate human conquests, which go beyond acquisitions limited to the social belonging of everyday life.

According to the historical-cultural conception of development, children are not born with developed complex psychic functions; therefore, activities requiring such training will be necessary. As proposed by Leontiev (1978), man is a social and historical being, and apart from social relations, he would never develop qualities that resulted from the long cultural development of humanity. According to historical-cultural assumptions defended by both Leontiev and Vygotsky, human development occurs through educational processes to which an individual is subjected throughout life, even though there are qualitative differences due to the type of education to which he or she has access.

Concerning the appropriation of writing, the heart of the matter is in the conception of language. Vygotsky (2001) states, “thought and language are keys to understanding the human consciousness nature. [...] the word plays a central role in consciousness, not isolated functions. [...] The conscious word is the microcosm of human consciousness” (pp.485-486). This excerpt highlights the author’s analysis of the relation between thought and language; he points to words as the unit of consciousness analysis. Developmental teaching, which effectively transforms consciousness, must necessarily enable the understanding of conceptual links that insert the word’s meaning into a conceptual system.

The word, in turn, is always a generalization, as it never refers to an isolated object, but to a class. Therefore, the appropriation of a word cannot be watertight, mechanical, or static. However, generalization is an act of thought that, in turn, forms and develops. The thesis defended by Vigotski (2001) asserts that the word’s meaning develops and changes its structure throughout ontogenesis. In this direction, the conquest of written language enables a qualitative leap in the development of conceptual thinking, altering a child’s psychic functioning. And when it comes to methodological treatment for teaching writing, it must be considered that writing is not affected by isolated and independent elements such as in a perspective of a mere association between sound and graphic elements.

According to Martins (2013), success in writing acquisition is not something limited to the moment in which a child is ‘taught to write,’ but it depends profoundly on the history of his development, that is, to learn to read and write, a person must operate with symbolic instruments through logical operations of reasoning -namely, analysis and synthesis-, comparison, generalization and abstraction, inferring the means of graphic representation of sounds. Based on historical-cultural psychology and historical-critical pedagogy, we highlight that writing appropriation does not reproduce the path of the acquisition of spoken language. However, it will be through it – as a sign system - that the possibility of representation and, therefore, the formation of the ‘idea of something’ in other terms will arise. Writing will only be possible when a child can take an object for another, abstract, and elaborate on the word concept (Franco & Martins, 2021).

Vygotsky (2001), referring to this process, states: “[...] if external language appears in evolution before internal language, writing, in turn, appears after internal language, already assuming its existence” (p. 316). In other words, the internalization of language enables the duplication of the material world and the possibility of representing and relating ideas, expanding the person’s opportunities to reflect the world and himself subjectively. Objects acquire meaning due to the alliance between language and thought. What is at issue is teaching a child to abstract the essential traits of things.

In this sense, when a child begins to speak, naming objects, “[...] the possibility of representing something is created, and this moment marks the beginning of a long process that brings with it the possibility of developing writing. as a psychic tool” (Franco & Martins, 2021, p. 110). In this wake, Luria (1986) points out that the word, as an instrument of interpersonal relation and

knowledge, also emerges as a means of regulating higher psychic processes directly linked to voluntary act origins.

In summary, a child's development path culminates in achievements that allow him to take one thing for another and internally represent external reality through signs. These achievements will bring with them the possibility of making concept formation more complex and, consequently, elaborating the word idea/concept. This acquisition is supported by logical operations of thought, especially in generalization and abstraction (Franco & Martins, 2021).

Speech is, therefore, an essential tool for writing appropriation by organizing thought through concepts, making psychic functioning more complex, constituting, in the child, the possibility of forming uniquely human capacities, namely, social experience, accumulation appropriation, and behavior self-control.

Recognizing the intrinsic relations that exist between oral language and written language, without, however, taking the second as a direct transposition of the first, Franco and Martins (2021) emphasize that the methodological teaching path should consider the word as the linguistic unit of reference, especially in the early years of schooling, which should be subjected to analysis through teaching organized for this purpose intentionally. For that matter, school education needs to focus on the representation process and concept development possibilities, seeking to generate in the child, at the end of this procedure, the need to represent his idea graphically. Only then will the literacy process be successful, remembering that graphing ideas implies being able to abstract the sensory aspect of speech and advance in the construction of an "[...] abstract language, which does not use words but representations of words" (Vygotsky, 2001, p. 313).

In the same direction, Dangiό and Martins (2015) posit that the movement between phonetic and semantic faces of the word appears, in teaching processes, in didactic actions and operations with reading and writing. If the objective is to learn the writing system, the emphasis is on phonetic and phonological tracts; if the aim is to interpret the textual supports of the word, the focus is on its meanings and senses (Franco & Martins, 2021). Supported by the ideas of Dangiό and Martins (2015), we consider that written language teaching represents for the child the possibility of mastering a complex symbolic system and his success is directly related to the development of higher psychic functions throughout child development. In this direction, the set of learning that involves writing and reading will allow the qualitative transformation of a child's relations with reality. He can think about the world beyond immediate reality through science, art and philosophy instruction, initiating incursions beyond the phenomena's appearance. Thus, providing conditions for teachers to organize their pedagogical practice is crucial for student learning. But for that, we must provide conditions for teachers that go beyond the apparent dimension of the teaching organization and, through a learning process, to be able to reframe their way of organizing their activities. For the teacher to achieve the conditions for organizing teaching, it is necessary to overcome existing training models that are based on technical instruments and little conceptual training. The current conditions offered in primary and continuing teacher training have promoted the emptying of the possibilities of working consciously with language. It is

necessary to form a teacher's conceptual thinking about the written word, and this is only possible with training activities committed to this objective. Only a theoretical-methodological understanding of the formation possibilities of a child's conscience allows for adequate planning of study activities, enhances didactic resources, and allows the student a significant appropriation of writing and reading.

Final considerations

The issues outlined here present challenges imposed on an emancipatory education. We understand that neoliberal models offered by the capitalist mode of production take education as a commodity, reduce the social right to it, and subject schooling to market demands. In this direction, educational policy reforms implemented in recent years in Brazil do not meet working-class interests.

Against these proposals, we argue that schools can contribute to unveiling the nature of social relations in capitalist society and their effects on the processes of exploitation and alienation. However, the fundamentals supporting this text indicate that critical knowledge is necessary for the class struggle and the construction of a socialist revolution. Based on Marx, Frigotto (2021) reminds us that theory constitutes a revolutionary material force. Still, its revolutionary character is not exhausted in the correct understanding of how human reality is produced under capitalism. Moreover, the scientificity of knowing makes explicit its potential revolutionary in practice.

Considering the above, we return to our introduction, where Evaristo (2021) points out, *"She also discovered that knowing how to read and sign her name was not enough. Another wisdom had to be learned from reading. She had to authorize the text of her life, just as she had to help build her origin's story (...)"* (p.110). This excerpt takes us back to foundations of historical-cultural psychology and historical-critical pedagogy, which we presented with an emancipatory education in mind. In dealing with literacy, we understand that it is not enough to understand writing as a motor act that limits teaching to tracing letters and the writing, often mechanical, of words, phrases and sentences. In Vygotsky's (1995) words, "[...] we need to teach the child the written language and not the writing of letters" (p. 203).

Literacy presupposes, above all, access to literate culture and allowing subjects' psyche to reach their broadest development possibilities, represented by rigorously abstract thinking. We consider that the alliance between these two acquisitions imposes itself as a condition for individuals to establish themselves as subjects of their history, equipping themselves for the struggles to be waged against objective and subjective conditions that stand as obstacles to this. However, we cannot lose sight of the fact that language is one of the most complex psychic functions; its functioning is related to other functions, mainly to thought (Dangiό & Martins, 2015). The transformation of thought contents and other higher psychic functions are subordinated to people's living and

educational conditions and deeply marked by socially determined cultural development. Therefore, the struggle for emancipatory education is identified with overcoming social-economic inequalities produced by private ownership of production modes.

“To become aware of something and to apprehend something is initially necessary to have that thing” (Vygotsky, 2001, p. 287). To authorize the text of one's life and help build one's history, there must be a teaching that is able to instrumentalize this ideal construction. As Carvalho and Martins (2016) state, a tireless battle must be fought towards training that culminates in adult individuals who are more subjected and less subjected to the alienating conditions of capitalist society.

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Is disability a social construction?

On the critique of social constructivist views in (German-language) disability studies¹

Michael Zander

Abstract

What exactly do we mean when we refer to disability as a social construction? How viable are the justifications for this? These questions are explored in this paper. To this end, various theories that are influential in German-language disability studies are examined and criticised. These include Oliver's social model, furthermore the "Thomas theorem," Berger and Luckmann's sociology of knowledge, Foucault's discourse theory and Waldschmidt's theory on disability as "naturalised difference." Subsequently, social constructivist approaches of Watzlawick and Gergen and Gergen are discussed. It is shown that a relativistic understanding of social construction can be used to deny facticity and thus undermines the foundations of scientific knowledge. This danger must be taken seriously when defending the scientific basis of disability studies.

Keywords

social constructivism, sociology of science, materialism, truth, claims of validity

1. The question

As is well known, disability studies are a spectrum of interdisciplinary approaches in the social sciences, humanities and cultural studies that have one thing in common: They generally distinguish between (medically diagnosable) illness or impairment, on the one hand, and socially caused disability, exclusion or oppression, on the other. In contrast to reductionist and medicalist approaches (cf. Oliver, 1983, pp. 2., 1996, p. 31), this distinction is intended to open up new perspectives for social and cultural studies research on disability and, beyond this, to provide a basis for political intervention in the interests of disabled

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people. If social disability is no longer misunderstood as the inevitable consequence of a medically describable impairment, the deficiencies of social conditions, infrastructures and institutions can come to the fore. The distinction between impairment and disability is the basis for what has been called and much discussed as the 'social model of disability.' Other models, such as the so-called cultural model and the human rights model, have been derived from it and developed in distinction to it.

Furthermore, the thesis that disability is a social construction has become established - not only, but especially, in German-speaking disability studies. According to Gisela Hermes and Swantje Köbsell (2003, p. 9), disability is regarded as a "constructed category" and disability studies is dedicated to "the question of how this social construction of disability takes place or has taken place historically, economically, culturally, politically, legally, psychologically, etc." (p. 9). Similarly, Theresia Degener (2003, p. 24) states that disability is "socially constructed, i.e. disability is artificially made into a problem by society." Michael Maschke and Justin Powell (2003, pp. 80) ask "how long old constructions that have become institutionalised in space and time remain stable." In short, they say that "disability is simply what politics defines as disability" (Maschke & Powell, 2003, p. 81).

The view that disability is a social construction has become a defining feature of disability studies in German-language literature. Anne Waldschmidt speaks of a "constructivist basic consensus" (Waldschmidt, 2015, p. 336) in disability studies. David Brehme et al. (2020, p. 9) state: "Disability studies does not understand disability as a natural, super-historical phenomenon – but as a socially negatively valued difference that is socially constructed and therefore must always be analysed, interpreted and made understandable in its respective historical, social and cultural context."

While there are competing currents with different philosophical foundations in international disability studies (Shakespeare, 2014), social constructivist approaches predominate in Germany. Anne Waldschmidt, probably the most influential sociological theorist of disability studies in the German-speaking world at present, places a social constructivist understanding of disability at the centre of her work. Social constructivist approaches have hardly been discussed controversially in German-language disability studies, apart from exceptions that have received relatively little attention to date (Kuhlmann, 2003, 2005; Kastl, 2017; Trüper, 2019; for international debates, see e.g. Hacking, 2001; Shakespeare, 2014). This is noteworthy because the above statements and definitions already reveal a central problem of social constructivist approaches, namely the tendency to equate the concept of an object with the object itself. The concept of disability and the ideas associated with it are addressed, but not what these concepts and ideas refer to. It is well known that the *term* 'dog' doesn't bark. However controversial diagnoses such as cerebral palsy, deafness, early childhood autism, depression or schizophrenia may be, they all refer to something that persists even if it is changed or abolished. The same is true of possible manifestations of social disadvantage, such as increased unemployment or reduced life expectancy.

What exactly do we mean when we talk about disability as a social construction? How viable are the justifications for it? This paper discusses these questions and critiques the 'basic constructivist consensus.' It does so by tracing a line of theoretical development that has led to the dominance of social constructivist views. The starting point is Michael Oliver's social model, about which so much has been written in recent decades that its original content needs to be recalled. Oliver uses the term "social construction" in his works, but rejects social constructivism; at the same time, he invokes - in a not unproblematic way - Marxian theory. The line of development, as will be shown, leads from the so-called Thomas theorem via Peter Berger's and Thomas Luckmann's conception of the social construction of reality and Michel Foucault's discourse theory to Anne Waldschmidt's social constructivist positions and to constructivisms in relation to psychiatric diagnoses, as advocated by Paul Watzlawick and Kenneth and Mary Gergen, among others.

The critique of the basic constructivist consensus in (German-language) disability studies pursues four main goals: First, to remind us of the "objective facticity" (Berger & Luckmann, 1991 [1966], p. 30) of nature and society and that people do not create their world out of nothing. The recognition of that objective facticity is the precondition of science, but it is increasingly evaporating in the course of social constructivist theorising. Second, it will be examined what is understood by the "cryptogram" (Plessner, 2018 [1969], pp. X) of social construction in each of the works discussed and what inconsistencies this implies. Third, attention is to be drawn to political dangers of epistemological relativism in the age of 'fake news' and 'fake science.' Fourthly, the critique is intended to break the postulated social constructivist basic consensus and create more space for non-constructivist approaches within disability studies.

2. Social model and social construction of disability by Michael Oliver

For the formulation of the social model of disability, Michael Oliver (1983, pp. 23) draws on publications of the British Union of the Physically Impaired Against Segregation (UPIAS) from the 1970s (UPIAS, 1974, 1975). He distinguishes between impairment and disability: the former means the absence or impairment of a body part or a body or organ function, the latter includes disadvantages or activity restrictions caused by the organisation of society and its lack of consideration for disabled people (Oliver, 1990, p. 11).

Impairment and disability in the sense of the social model are different and at the same time interrelated. For example, if a building is only accessible by stairs, this constitutes a social disability for people with walking impairments, but not necessarily for others. While the lack of a ramp or lift may also be a disruptive obstacle for people travelling with a pram or who need to deliver goods, in these cases it is not a disability.

Differentiating disability from impairment opens up a specific perspective. Oliver illustrates this with the example of items from a survey by the UK Office

of Population Censuses and Surveys (OPCS). These only record impairments as supposed or real causes of limitations: "Can you tell me what is wrong with you? What complaint causes your difficulty in holding, gripping or turning things?" "Are your difficulties in understanding people mainly due to a hearing problem?" (Oliver, 1990, p. 7). Oliver contrasts this with alternative questions that focus on disability: "Can you tell me what is wrong with society? What defects in the design of everyday equipment like jars, bottles and tins cause you difficulty in holding, gripping or turning them? Are your difficulties in understanding people mainly due to their inability to communicate with you?" (Oliver, 1990, p. 8) The comparison not only illustrates the difference between impairment and disability, it also shows the individualisation and medicalisation of disability in the OPCS questionnaire.

Against the background of the social model, Oliver discusses sociological and historical theories of disability. He also cites ethnological literature which shows that the treatment of impairments or disabled people varies with the respective culture and form of society. His main focus is on the development of capitalism in Britain. In the course of industrialisation during the 18th and 19th centuries, pre-capitalist and agrarian living conditions dissolved and with them the peasant and domestic production, in which impaired people had been more or less integrated. Within increasingly capitalist conditions and in view of a growing demand for labour, the question of who is or is not fit for work in industry and how to restore the ability to work has become a problem (Oliver, 1990, pp. 28). This has led, among other things, to the medicalisation of disability, a contradictory process that has also brought gains for disabled people, including an increase in their average life expectancy.

Oliver (1990) argues that British capitalism and social policy in the 1980s constructed disability (or the problem of disability) ideologically and socially. Firstly, beliefs expressed in social policy, such as that disability is a personal misfortune and a medical problem; secondly, construction means producing real social relations in which disabled people are not just seen as dependent, but actually are. However, the concepts of ideological and social construction do not seem to be entirely distinct, as they both involve socially and politically enforced stereotypes about disability. For Oliver, unlike Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, ideology is not a socially imposed deception about social conditions and human motives for action (Zander, 2020), but simply a set of values or beliefs (Oliver, 1990, p. 43). Although Oliver speaks of social construction several times, he distances himself from social constructivism, which he accuses of reducing historical processes to the substitution of labels (Oliver, 1990, p. 82).

Oliver's work is generally regarded as Marxist, but the extent to which this characterisation is accurate is debatable. It is true that Karl Marx is quoted several times and capitalism plays a central role, but at the same time Oliver refers to numerous non-Marxist "classics" such as Auguste Comte, Max Weber, George Herbert Mead, Claude Lévi-Strauss and Michel Foucault, without resulting in a coherent theoretical account. Some of his theses may sound Marxist, but they are not compatible with Marxist theory. For example, the strange assertion that in capitalism the category of disability is industrially

produced like cars and hamburgers (Oliver, 1996, p. 127). Marx is concerned, among other things, with the buying and selling of commodities and commodity-like services, and the production and appropriation of profit. It is not clear how a category can be industrially produced, how it can be bought or sold, and how profit can be made from it. Despite such inconsistencies, it must be acknowledged that Oliver has at least presented the outlines of a materialist theory of disability under capitalism.

3. The "Thomas Theorem"

To underline the importance of definitions and constructions, Oliver (1990, p. 2) refers to the so-called Thomas theorem, according to which a situation defined by people as real has real consequences. Depending on whether disability is understood as personal misfortune or as social oppression, this has different consequences. Rehabilitation, according to Oliver (1996, p. 102), consists of the sum of those practices that are defined as rehabilitation. This is reminiscent of the position of Maschke and Powell (2003, p. 81) cited earlier, according to which disability is what politics defines as disability. The term Thomas theorem comes from Robert Merton (1968, p. 575) and goes back to a formulation by William Thomas and Dorothy Swaine Thomas (1928). It is worth discussing the Thomas theorem in some detail because it raises theoretical issues that also arise in the context of the thesis that disability is a social construction.

In their book, Thomas and Swaine Thomas address delinquency, behavioural problems and disorders in children against the background of social change in the United States (Thomas & Swaine Thomas, 1928, p. xiii). In the methodological section, they advocate, among other things, the evaluation of 'behavioural documents,' including case studies, life histories and statements from psychoanalysis. The authors counter the objection of behaviourists that such introspective self-reports are not objective and valid and do not reveal the actual mechanisms of behaviour. They argue that these behavioural documents reveal how a person interprets a situation and how he or she acts on the basis of that interpretation. As an example, they cite a prison inmate who is said to have killed people because he thought they had insulted him, when in fact they had only been talking to themselves. It is in this context that they formulate their famous phrase: "If men define situations as real, they are real in their consequence" (Thomas & Swaine Thomas, 1928, p. 572).

The so-called Thomas theorem is undoubtedly true in the sense that people act on the basis of their beliefs and that their beliefs relate to, among other things, what they take for granted and what they do not take for granted in a given situation. Of course, beliefs can be wrong, as when someone believes they have been insulted by passers-by when they have not. Or, to take a more recent example: A person may believe that coronavirus type 2 is no more dangerous than ordinary influenza viruses and, based on this misconception, may not follow mandatory or recommended hygiene rules during the coronavirus pandemic.

However, it would be problematic to interpret the Thomas theorem as a recommendation to examine situation definitions only in terms of their influence on action, neglecting whether or in what respect they are true or false, appropriate or inappropriate in terms of content. In other words, one has to take into account the possible – and in fact addressed in the example of Thomas and Swaine Thomas – "*difference* between subjective perception and what is perceived" (Markard, 2013, section VI). Of course, it is not always possible to make such a difference, whether for practical or principled reasons. Not every circumstance can be elucidated and not every situational definition can be judged by an objective standard. One may perceive disability as a personal misfortune or as a social oppression; one is no less true than the other; moreover, the two views are not necessarily mutually exclusive. In other cases, however, there is a clear difference between the perceived and the perceived. The passers-by were not insulting the prisoner, as the latter believed, but talking to themselves; COVID-19 is much more dangerous than influenza, for example, as measured by mortality rates, contrary to the claims of the so-called Corona sceptics.

When it comes to situational definitions or beliefs in the sense of Thomas and Swaine Thomas, one of the tasks of science is not only to register and understand them, but also to explain them. Depending on the focus of the investigation, explanations can refer to individual reasons for action against the background of concrete living conditions or to developments in society as a whole. In the case of a 'Corona denier,' the overall social context of the crisis caused by the pandemic, the emergence of the conspiracy ideology movement and - related to this - personal problems may play a role. The importance of relying on scientific explanations can be seen in the refutation of false perceptions of impairment, where errors are a necessary part of scientific development. For example, hardly anyone in the scientific community today assumes that emotionally cold and at the same time above-average intelligent parents are partly responsible for the development of early childhood autism (Kanner, 1943, pp. 248), or that schizophrenia is triggered by double-bind communication in the family (Bateson et al., 1956).

The social sciences can and must, of course, investigate imaginations and their efficacy - for example, belief in horoscopes, transubstantiation, human races, world conspiracies, and so on. - but their own concepts must not be purely imaginary if the claim to a scientific basis is not to be abandoned. Rather, scientific terms must be associated with the claim to understand and explain real phenomena that exist in the world independently of scientific investigation. For example, terms such as poverty or disability cannot be defined scientifically without theory, but they should refer descriptively, analytically and in the most factual way possible to empirical phenomena that are real and independent facts. If this were not so, then these terms would have no scientific content and there would be no reasonable standard against which they could be verified. For the discussion of whether disability is a social construction, two conclusions can be drawn from these considerations, among others: Firstly, scientific terms should not be arbitrary 'constructions' alongside others; secondly, a careful distinction should be made between the designating terms and the objects they designate.

4. The "Social Construction of Reality" by Berger and Luckmann

Peter Berger and Thomas Luckmann (1991 [1966]) introduced the concept of the "social construction of reality" into the debate. In his preface to the German edition, Hellmuth Plessner comments on the eponymous book title as follows: "As attractive as such a cryptogram may be to philosophers who take pleasure in ciphers - the adepts of sociology, to whom it is nevertheless addressed, could be downright put off by it. The element of construction, after all, is perceived as an adversary of every scientific endeavour that attaches and must attach importance to the faithful reproduction of real conditions" (Plessner, 2018 [1969], pp. X). Therefore, Plessner continues, the "explanatory addition in the subtitle" is to be welcomed (p. XI). This clarifies that the authors present a "treatise of the sociology of knowledge."

Plessner's assessment is interesting in three respects: First, it articulates the expectation that the audience will not find the concept of "social construction" immediately comprehensible, but will regard it as a "cryptogram" to be deciphered. Secondly, it addresses a potential tension between the construction thesis and the claim to scientifically describe "real conditions" (Plessner, 2018 [1969], pp. X). As will be shown, Berger and Luckmann did not see this as a contradiction, but the tension that developed in later postmodern currents of social constructivism towards a radical epistemological scepticism is nevertheless already inherent in their work. Thirdly, it is clear from Plessner's commentary that the neologism of the book's title was originally intended as a technical term for a specific sub-discipline of sociology - namely the sociology of knowledge - while its use today has a following in virtually all social sciences, cultural studies and the humanities. Incidentally, the main title of the book is an allusion to a work by Berger and Luckmann's academic teacher: "Der sinnhafte Aufbau der sozialen Welt" ["The Meaningful Construction of the Social World"] by Alfred Schütz (2016 [1932]) (cf. Luckmann et al., 2015, p. 428).

According to Berger and Luckmann (1991 [1966], p. 15), the sociology of knowledge has to deal with "whatever passes for 'knowledge' in a society, regardless of the ultimate validity or invalidity." It has to fathom how knowledge is "developed, transmitted and maintained in social situations" and "must seek to understand the processes by which this is done in such a way that a taken-for-granted 'reality' congeals for the man in the street" (p. 15). This process is the social construction of reality. The respective knowledge depends on the social location within and between societies: "What is 'real' to a Tibetan monk may not be 'real' to an American businessman" (Berger & Luckmann, 1991 [1966], p. 15).

The thesis of the location-dependence of knowledge leads the authors to ask how claims to the validity of sociological findings can be justified. "How can I be sure, say, of my sociological analysis of American middle-class *mores* in view of the fact that the categories I use for this analysis are conditioned by historically relative forms of thought, that I myself and everything I think is determined by my genes and by my ingrown hostility to my fellowmen, and that, to cap it all, I am myself a member of the American middle class?" (Berger & Luckmann, 1991 [1966], p. 25). Berger and Luckmann do not dispose of this problem through

substantive arguments – one could, for example, invoke the fact that scientific theories and methods secure the validity of findings – but by excluding it from empirical sociology. Such questions belonged to the methodology of the social sciences and to philosophy (Berger & Luckmann, 1991 [1966], p. 25).

There is no doubt that Berger and Luckmann claim validity for their own statements. In their book, they deal extensively with "society as objective reality" (pp. 65), including the biological characteristics that enable people to form institutions. The "subjective reality" includes in particular individual socialisation, i.e. the "internalisation of reality" (p. 149). This internalisation can become a problem for members of stigmatised groups, if society has stamped them as a type: "the cripple, the bastard, the idiot and so on" (p. 185). However, the stigmatised could "join together in groups" and "introduce their own socialisation process" in order to protect themselves "from the total internalisation of the reality of their society" (pp. 177).

An example of an institution that, according to Berger and Luckmann, generates knowledge and is supposed to protect society from deviation is therapy. Its methods range "from exorcism to psycho-analysis, from pastoral care to personnel counselling programmes" and serve social control (Berger & Luckmann, 1991 [1966], p. 130). To illustrate and invert the prevailing homophobia, the authors create the counter-image of a society in which heterosexuality is frowned upon and in which a heterosexual soldier is "a sure candidate for therapy" (Berger & Luckmann, 1991 [1966], p. 131). In passing, they invoke the Thomas theorem but, like Merton before them, attribute it only to William Thomas and not Dorothy Swaine Thomas (Berger & Luckmann, 1991 [1966], p. 221), whose co-authorship Merton (1995) later added.

As stimulating and rewarding as Berger and Luckmann's analysis is to read for long stretches, it also has some serious problems. The "man in the street" (Berger & Luckmann, 1991 [1966], p. 13), to whom the authors refer several times, appears to them as a largely passive recipient of knowledge. He obviously has no way of testing statements for truth and norms for reasonableness. He cannot therefore use these criteria to distinguish between exorcism and psychoanalysis, or between different variants of psychoanalysis. The concept of knowledge used by Berger and Luckmann, at least in relation to the 'man in the street,' is so general that it can no longer be used to distinguish between knowledge and its opposite, i.e. ignorance, deception and prejudice. Perhaps the most appropriate name for their enterprise would not be sociology of knowledge, but sociology of opinion. Opinions can be well-founded or unfounded, true or false, whereas the classical concept of knowledge (Boghossian, 2006, p. 10 ff.; Carlshamre, 2022, ch. 1) already contains a qualitative judgement: If something is actually known and not only supposedly known, then it is the case.

Berger and Luckmann distance themselves from social constructivism. Some 40 years after the book's publication, Luckmann stresses that Berger and he "could not have known then about constructivism, which did not yet exist, and do not want to know today about the later epistemologically and scientifically untenable developments (...)" (Luckmann, 2008, p. 33). (Luckmann, 2008, p. 33). Compared to positions such as those of Paul Watzlawick (see below), Berger and

he are "in a certain sense materialists" (Luckmann, quoted in Keller et al., 2013, p. 11). Similarly, Berger complains that a "sociological direction" has emerged that "to our annoyance called itself 'constructivism' and claimed that all interpretations are equal and, moreover, that there is no reality at all outside of social interpretation" (Berger, cited in Keller et al., 2013, p. 10).

5. On Foucault's theory of knowledge and discourse

Michel Foucault's works played an important role in the emergence of the variants of social constructivism criticised by Berger and Luckmann, although the concept of social construction does not appear in them. Foucault was and is also widely read in disability studies (Waldschmidt, 2020, pp. 98). In his inaugural lecture at the Collège de France in 1970, Foucault (1981 [1970]) presented his research programme, for which the concept of 'discourse' is central. For him, discourses are certain rule-bound systems of statements that are produced on certain subject areas – such as sexuality, politics or science – and which together form the discourse of a society. Discourse is a "thing pronounced or written" (Foucault, 1981 [1970], p. 51) whose production is "controlled, selected, organised and redistributed" (p. 52), among other things with "procedures of exclusion" (p. 52). These procedures include prohibition and the drawing of boundaries, e.g. the "opposition of reason and madness" (p. 53) and the "division between the true and the false" (p. 54). Within a discourse, the "division between the true and the false is neither arbitrary nor modifiable nor institutional nor violent;" but if one goes on "to different scale" and asks about the "will to truth," then one will see "perhaps something like a system of exclusion, a historical, modifiable, institutionally constraining system" (Foucault, 1981 [1970], p. 54). The will to truth tends to "exert a sort of pressure [...] on other discourses" (p. 55). In science there may be "no errors in the strict sense," as these "can only arise and be decided inside a definite practice" (p. 60).

For Foucault, discourse seems to have a direct effect on the facts it thematises, which are supposedly unknowable without it. There "is no prediscursive providence which disposes the world in our favour. We must conceive of discourse as a violence that we do to things, or in any case as a practice that we impose on them" (Foucault, 1981 [1970], p. 67). Overall, Foucault wants his research programme to be understood as a contribution to the "history of ideas" (p. 69). Later on, he sharpened his views even further. It is assumed that "power produces knowledge," which is why the relations between power and knowledge cannot be analysed "on the basis of a subject of knowledge;" rather, the subject of knowledge and the object to be known are equally "effects" (Foucault, 1995 [1977], pp. 27) of the relations between knowledge and power.

Among other things, Foucault's research programme is directed against Marxism, which was influential in French sociology and philosophy in the 1970s. Typical Marxian problems disappear and are replaced by others. Marx and Engels assume that in the course of social activities based on a more or less

division of labour, people must feed, clothe, house, reproduce, in short, keep themselves alive and satisfy the corresponding needs before they make history. To do this, they have to enter into a metabolism with external nature and organise their production with historically determined and conflictual relations of production. Foucault, on the other hand, prefers to deal with discourses, ideas, knowledge, language and power, which in his theory lead a strange life of their own. For Marx and Engels, ideology was a socially suggested deception that can be overcome by scientific means. But a discourse can no longer be said to contain illusions or not. The view of Marx and Engels was that there were generalisable interests and that people in social conflicts struggle to arrange the world according to their needs; with Foucault, merely one regime of power and knowledge replaces the other.

When Foucault characterises the distinction between true and false statements as an institutional exclusion mechanism, he abstracts from the fact that scientific statements can claim validity, if they can be substantiated and elaborated into a coherent argument. Foucault's "interest in truth (and validity in general) is restricted to the effects of holding-something-as-truth" (Habermas, 1998 [1985], p. 373). But there is a crucial and non-negligible difference between the Vatican indexing Galilean astronomy and a US university dismissing a history lecturer who claimed "that Nazi death camps were an anti-German hoax" (Evans, 1997, p. 208). In Foucault's theory, the difference between oppression and refutation threatens to disappear. Foucault accuses the "will to true" – an expression that not coincidentally recalls Friedrich Nietzsche's "will to power" (cf. Rehmann, 2022) – of exerting "pressure." It is not comprehensible why discourses should impose themselves on their subjects. Scientific essays on cerebral palsy or on the unemployment rate among people with cerebral palsy have no direct influence on what they deal with. What is created in universities, colleges and research institutes – errors and ideologies included – can have negative consequences for disabled people, and these consequences can be an expression of power. But power and knowledge are not necessarily fused, otherwise there could be no science that can claim validity for its statements, only politics. As Jürgen Habermas (1998 [1985]) points out, this problem also arises for Foucault's own work. If the claim to truth and the superiority of Foucault's analyses did not show in these themselves, but "were to expressed in the effect of its suppressing the hitherto dominant scientific discourses, then Foucault's theory exhaust itself in theory politics" (Habermas, 1998 [1985], p. 279).

6. Disability as "naturalised difference" in Waldschmidt's work

The work of Anne Waldschmidt, a leading representative of disability studies in Germany, is characterised by a particularly elaborate theoretical underpinning of the thesis of disability as a social construction. Key points of reference are Berger, Luckmann and Foucault (Waldschmidt et al., 2007; Waldschmidt, 2011, 2018). The core idea of the theory, which has been formulated and varied several

times, is that disability and the body are not "natural facts," but social constructions. The medium of construction is discourse, i.e. mainly concepts or categories. In this sense, it is said that bodies "do not exist a priori as simple facts of nature," but are "constructed through discourses and in discourses" (Waldschmidt, 2011, p. 94). The human sciences in particular produce a "knowledge of power" that determines "how bodies are perceived and treated" (Waldschmidt, 2011, p. 94). In general, "abnormalities and deviations" are regarded as a "(natural) given, in the sense of a supposedly objectively existing, medico-biologically definable damage or impairment, and not as a social differentiating feature" (Waldschmidt 2011, p. 98).

Waldschmidt explicitly relates her statement to impairment and links it to a definition and positioning of disability studies. In contrast to conventional approaches, disability studies "see disability, i.e. not only disability but also impairment, as a product of social and cultural mechanisms of exclusion and oppression rather than as an expression of medical pathology" (Waldschmidt, 2011, p. 91). Disability does not exist objectively and cannot be defined medically or biologically (Waldschmidt, 2015, p. 335). The construction of disability has the function of "producing the naturalised level of intervention impairment and at the same time withdrawing it from criticism by considering the latter [...] as prior, given by nature" (Waldschmidt, 2011, p. 98). In the context of a study on everyday work in sheltered workshops, it is said that the "category of difference disability" is not a "biomedical or psychological fact, but a tense interrelation between 'normality' and a specific type of 'otherness'" (Karim & Waldschmidt, 2019, p. 270 f.). Essentially, "'intellectual disability' is not an objectively measurable fact that is merely reflected in the degree of disability, but a contingent relationship that can only be explained in interaction with existing institutional structures" (Karim & Waldschmidt, 2019, p. 279).

As an example of a constructed difference, Waldschmidt (2018) mentions deafness, which is commonly understood as a loss of hearing and a biological deficit. The Deaf community counters this by arguing that deafness is a cultural difference and a sign language competence. Deafness, according to Waldschmidt, is not a "natural fact," but a "naturalised difference" (Waldschmidt, 2018, p. 75); disability exists only insofar as certain differences can be distinguished within a given order of knowledge.

The question is whether these opposites are mutually exclusive and whether, in analysing disability, we really have to choose between 'natural' and 'cultural'. Deafness has intrinsic characteristics and identifiable causes. For example, it can occur as a result of an infection and in this case, like other disabilities, it is the residue of a disease. The fact that deaf people sign and thus develop a specific culture only argues against the fact that deafness must be a misfortune and a deficiency, but not against the fact that it is also a medically describable fact. The medical approach emphasises different aspects of deafness than the cultural approach. Deafness as a physical characteristic – like most other impairments – exists in all societies and cultures, but the classification of hearing impairments and the everyday living conditions of deaf and disabled people may be different in each case. At the same time, impairment can be a differentiating

factor, for example, when society regulates who is entitled to compensation for disadvantage and who is not.

The term construction tends to create ambiguity here. It would be more appropriate to speak of social interpretations, because interpretations do not change their object – e.g. deafness –, but accentuate different aspects from which different conclusions can be drawn. For example, a medical diagnosis does not necessarily lead to a particular medical treatment, such as the use of a cochlear implant. Terms, classifications, correlations, etc. are made or constructed, but they refer to impairments, i.e. to facts and phenomena that have not been constructed, but at most modified, e.g. deafness or spasticity.

It is not clear why deafness, cerebral palsy, trisomies or early childhood autism should in themselves be products of "social and cultural mechanisms of exclusion and oppression" (Waldschmidt, 2011, p. 91), unless it is not deafness, cerebral palsy, trisomies or autism as such that is meant, but certain prejudices and stereotypes about these impairments. The same goes for statements about bodies. It is not the bodies themselves that are obviously socially constructed, but at best the ideas that people have about them. These ideas, when they become relevant to action, may have real consequences in the sense of the Thomas theorem, but they may themselves be true or false, appropriate or inappropriate to varying degrees. Even if disability is understood as a relationship between institutional requirements and personal characteristics, this does not mean that the personal characteristics – if they actually exist and are not merely the result of attributions – exist only within this relationship. In any case, disability is more than just an "effect of social attribution practices" (Waldschmidt, 2020, p. 36). The thesis that the construction of disability has the function of "producing a naturalised level of intervention impairment" and a "technical-strategic access" (Waldschmidt, 2011, p. 98) implies a general and obviously negatively evaluated motive, without saying whose motive it is. That the distinction between medically relevant and social aspects of disability can be necessary and in the interest of disabled people is obvious when one thinks, for example, of barrier-free access to appropriate medical care.

Waldschmidt (2020, p. 34) refers to disability as an "empty signifier" and explains that terms "do not simply denote reality, but produce the facts of which they speak" (Waldschmidt, 2020, p. 34). Empty signifiers are "open to a multiplicity of meanings": they are contested and "'filled' by discursive processes determined by hegemonic positions" (p. 34). Against this, it can be argued that the content of the term 'disability' may be contested, variable and contradictory, but it is not arbitrary. If I say 'disability' but talk about share prices, the weather and potato salad, I have missed the point and my counterpart will look at me uncomprehendingly. The term obviously has a relatively solid semantic core, referring to something real outside itself.

Overall, Waldschmidt's theory tends to emphasise concepts, classifications and symbols, and to dissolve in them what's conceptualised, classified and symbolised. This tendency is also evident in a contribution to so-called disability history. In the context of a research project on West German post-war history, Gabriele Lingelbach and Anne Waldschmidt (2016) define historical caesuras as

"interfaces" and "concise markers" that "clearly influence developments" (Lingelbach & Waldschmidt, 2016, p. 13). At the same time, they postulate that caesurae are "not properties of history per se [...] but place-dependent constructs" and "an interpretive achievement of the historian" (Lingelbach & Waldschmidt, 2016, p. 14). This dichotomy is not conclusive. Without interpretive services, there can be no historical science, but interpretations must be based not on fictions, but on objectively ascertainable characteristics of the historical process that are independent of the historian's location; otherwise they would be irrelevant, arbitrary, and thus unscientific (Evans, 1998). Nor should the assumption of social constructions lead to the reduction of disability history to "conceptual history" (Waldschmidt, 2020, pp. 24). It is important to remember that, as Hans-Walter Schmuhl (2010) writes in his history of the concept of disability, language is only "one of the factors" that "constitute social reality" (Schmuhl, 2010, p. 10), and it is not the most important one. Rather, language is "a sensitive seismograph that reflects the change of social reality – no more and no less" (Schmuhl, 2010, p. 10).

Schmuhl examines the historical processes by which an overarching category of disability was established, to which people could be assigned and to which they could assign themselves, and which Berger and Luckmann (see above) still subdivide into smaller groups. While this practice of categorisation can be described as a 'social construction,' this does not say anything about the ontological status of impairments and disabilities, nor does it prove that this form of categorisation is more exclusionary than others and that its elimination would be desirable for those categorised.

More recently, disability studies have received approaches from the so-called new materialism, which claim to overcome the language-centricity of social constructivism and poststructuralism (Hamraie, 2012; Feely, 2016). However, a detailed critique of these approaches, some of which confuse theoretical interest in material objects with materialism and ascribe mysterious activity and agency to these objects, cannot be provided here (for critiques, see e.g. Haug, 2016; Malm, 2018; v. Winterfeld, 2018).

7. Psychiatric diagnoses in the light of social constructivist views

A discussion of the concept of disability as a social construction would be incomplete if it did not also include approaches that, in contrast to those discussed so far, describe themselves as constructivist. From the family of constructivist theories, two will be selected here that are, on the one hand, relatively prominent and, on the other, interesting for disability studies and madness studies, because they deal with the ontological status of psychiatrically and psychologically diagnosable complaints. These are 'radical constructivism,' as advocated by Paul Watzlawick and others, and 'social constructionism,' as developed by Kenneth and Mary Gergen.

In an interview with Bernhard Pörksen (2001), Watzlawick suggests that cognition is only possible from a pragmatic point of view. To illustrate this, he

uses the image of a captain sailing through a strait in complete darkness and without navigational aids, and only afterwards being able to determine whether he has reached the open sea or not. According to Watzlawick, one must give up "the idea that science serves the knowledge of truth" (quoted in Pörksen, 2001, p. 222). It remains open, however, how he himself can know which of his own constructions in psychotherapy "prove to be the most useful and humane" (Pörksen, 2001, p. 222), if he does not have at least partial insights that can be described as true. We must agree with him when he points out that "The name is not the thing; the map is not the country" (Pörksen, 2001, p. 226). It is a mistake to believe that a mental illness exists simply because it has a name. One should not assume that "in the field of the psychological we are dealing with pathologies" that are similarly unambiguous "like appendicitis" (Pörksen, 2001, p. 227).

He gives two examples to illustrate this. The first is the removal of the diagnosis of homosexuality from the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual (DSM) in 1973; it was not removed from the International Classification of Diseases (ICD) until 1992. "This decision," says Watzlawick, "was the greatest therapeutic success in history. With the stroke of a pen, millions of people were freed from their alleged suffering" (Pörksen, 2001, p. 227). The second example concerns a visitor to a psychiatric ward who was mistaken for a patient diagnosed as schizophrenic by the nursing staff, who interpreted the visitor's resistance and alleged denial of her identity as symptoms of schizophrenia. However, this story does not prove, as Watzlawick admits in conversation with Pörksen, that schizophrenia diagnoses are arbitrary per se, but only that errors can have real consequences in the sense of the Thomas theorem. In contrast to the first example, people with 'schizophrenic' complaints would probably not be helped if the diagnosis were removed without replacement. There seem to be dimensions of schizophrenia which can be very debilitating and which are not included in the diagnosis. Dismissing it as a meaningless construct would amount to a "misconceived depathologisation" that can "lead to denial, ideological charging or romanticisation of the condition" (Boger, 2015, p. 272).

Kenneth and Mary Gergen (2009, p. 10) formulate the basic idea of their social constructionism as follows: "Everything that we consider real is socially constructed. [...] Nothing is real unless people agree that it is real." They did not mean to say that reality does not exist, but that one always speaks out of a tradition when defining something as real. This basic idea is not consistent, because if a reality exists independently of subjective perception, then there can be a difference between perception and what is perceived. This in turn means that reality cannot be dependent on the consensus of perceivers. Even if perceivers define reality from different traditions, there are objective insights into reality that can claim validity across all cultural boundaries. Insights such as the fact that the Pharaoh Ramses II died of tuberculosis and did not fall victim to a revolution will be discussed later.

From a social constructionist perspective, Gergen and Gergen continue, mental illness is not something that exists waiting to be discovered; rather, illness is constructed through action. If a sad person is given a diagnosis of depression,

he or she may become addicted to antidepressants for life. The authors advocate short-term narrative therapy to construct new stories. Although the criteria for diagnosis and the distinction between depression and ordinary grief are controversial (Frances, 2013), there is little doubt that the phenomena grouped under the diagnosis of 'moderate' or 'severe' depression are more than just sadness. The mood changes that cause people to lose the ability to be happy or to have any interest in the world at all cannot be explained or reversed 'narratively' alone. The claim that a diagnosis of depression puts people on drug treatment must be rejected in this sweeping way. A diagnosis can also be a prerequisite for medical leave or non-drug treatment. In the USA, Gergen and Gergen's home country, many people cannot afford psychotherapy because of the private co-payments required and are therefore dependent on psychotropic drugs (Olfson & Marcus, 2009). The social constructivist worldview, the sweeping and undifferentiated criticism of diagnoses and the plea for short-term therapies are problematically adapted to these conditions without Gergen and Gergen reflecting on this. Incidentally, one might ask whether the author and authoress also see drug addiction as a social construction that can be overcome through narratives – supposedly "everything" is socially constructed.

8. Political dangers of postmodern relativism

In the wake of the growing influence of social constructivist and postmodernist ideas in the 1990s, there has been an increasing theoretical relativisation of reality (Eagleton, 1997). A particularly blatant example comes from Bruno Latour. The philosopher once disputed the finding that the Pharaoh Ramses II died of tuberculosis with an absurd justification: Robert Koch had "discovered (or invented, or made up, or socially constructed)" the tubercle bacillus in 1882 (Latour, 1996, p. 248). And further: "The attribution of tuberculosis and Koch's bacillus to Ramses II should strike us as an anachronism of the same calibre as if we have diagnosed his death as having been caused by a Marxist upheaval [...]. Sure, if we want to respect actor's categories there must be in the Egyptian language a term or a set of hieroglyphs [...] that define the cause of Ramses' death" (Latour, 1996, pp. 248).

It is as if Latour has taken the Thomas theorem and theses by Foucault and Gergen and Gergen to extremes here and set them against scientific findings. He presents truth as something completely relative, dependent on the beliefs of those acting, on discourse and on traditions. Thomas Luckmann would have called this "gross nonsense" (Luckmann et al., 2015, p. 427). Similarly, Latour and other postmodern intellectuals have relativised global climate warming and questioned the existence of nature at all (critically, Malm, 2018).

Years later, Latour acknowledged parallels between postmodern and conspiracy ideological thinking, while attempting to defend his own earlier views. "I intended to emancipate the public from prematurely naturalized objectified facts. [...] Is it enough to say that we did not really mean what we said? Why does it burn my tongue to say that global warming is a fact whether

you like it or not?" (Latour, 2004, p. 227). Doubting scientific truth is no longer an exclusively postmodern domain. His neighbour considers him naïve because he believes that the attacks of 11 September 2001 were perpetrated by terrorists. "Of course, conspiracy theories are an absurd deformation of our own arguments, but, like weapons smuggled through a fuzzy border to the wrong party, these are our weapons nonetheless" (Latour, 2004, p. 230).

Latour would have been spared this unpleasant surprise, if he had taken seriously the earlier critique of postmodern philosophy and the warning that relativism, generalised scepticism about science and blanket critiques of the Enlightenment play into the hands of obscurantism and the extreme right (Eagleton, 1997; Evans, 1998; Sokal & Bricmont, 1999). When the conspiratorial right in the US today denies global warming and spreads its propaganda, its rhetoric is usually not overtly social constructionist, but it adopts the same cynical, instrumental attitude to facts as many postmodern intellectuals more closely associated with the left. That there are overlaps is shown by the example of the postmodern philosopher Giorgio Agamben (2020), who described the Corona pandemic as an invention of the state.

9. Conclusion and outlook: Is disability a social construction?

The aim of this study was to clarify what is meant by the claim that disability is a social construction and how viable the justifications for this claim are. A number of recurring problems run through the works discussed: These include the neglect of the question of the truth or falsity of statements, the short-circuiting of questions of truth and power, the emphasis on notions of disability at the expense of their subject matter, the absolutisation of language and discourse, the opposition of social construction and nature or objectivity, the stretching of the notion of construction to the extent that even bodies and nature are described as socially constructed. In its extreme forms, social constructivism leads to an epistemological relativism that is politically dangerous in that it abandons the claim to be scientific and thus paves the way for obscurantism, conspiracy ideologies, and an instrumental and power-oriented approach to questions of truth.

The thesis of disability as a social construction is by no means unambiguous or conclusive in all respects. Either the term construction should be abandoned or it should be explained exactly what is meant by it. This would involve answering questions such as: Who constructs and why? What is being constructed and is construction the appropriate term for the process? What is the medium of the construction process? Are statements associated with the process true or false, or appropriate or inappropriate?

The statement that disability is a social construction can be translated and concretised into non-constructivist language in a number of different ways, such as "The distinction between disability and non-disability has a history," "Medical diagnoses have a history," "Some impairments are caused by social processes (e.g. war)," "Different people have been involved in creating a situation where a

disabled person faces barriers in the past and is involved in the present," "A certain personal characteristic is generally considered to be pathological, but there are good factual reasons and it would be better for the person not to have it," "Some people have stereotypical and prejudiced ideas about disability."

If it is true that the construction thesis and the epistemological positions that usually underlie it are burdened with numerous inconsistencies and problems, then the question arises as to why they are nevertheless so popular in disability studies and in various other 'studies.' Paul Boghossian sees one reason for this in the fact that they allow us to simply reject "any claim to knowledge [...] if we happen not to share the values on which it allegedly depends" (Boghossian, 2006, p. 130). However, abandoning social constructivism would not necessarily mean compromising the academic and political programme of disability studies. Oppression, exclusion and prejudice can be critically examined from a non-constructivist perspective. At the same time, it would regain a standard for scientifically justifying and testing theories, rather than treating them as just one construction among others. Natural and medical aspects of impairments would no longer have to be set in hostile opposition to society and culture, but the different dimensions of impairment and disability would have to be worked out in a theoretically and empirically differentiated way.

In view of the difficulties outlined above, disability studies should not define itself through the construction thesis. Rather, there should be room in disability studies for other philosophical and epistemological positions, such as materialist or critical realist theories (Gleeson, 1997; Vehmas & Mäkelä, 2008). This would amount to a process of diversification from which disability studies should emerge stronger.

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The political and social construction of the parental subject and the subject of juvenile delinquency through Greek institutional justice: A Foucauldian-Critical Discourse Analysis¹

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Abstract

This paper is part of a master thesis, which aims to analyze the construction of the concept of juvenile delinquency through the comparison of the Scientific-Institutional Discourse and the Discourse of Volunteers. The broader epistemological context refers to the Constructionism of the Social Realism. Methodologically it contributes to the Foucauldian Discourse Analysis. At the macro – level a historical – genealogical construction of the concept is attempted, as well as a review of the dominant Scientific Discourses. At the micro level, website texts of institutions relevant to juvenile delinquency are analyzed and compared to the texts of twenty interviews from volunteers in the field of juvenile delinquency. The conclusive conversation shows – among others – that the two kinds of Discourse appear divergent as well as convergent and that juvenile delinquency is constructed as a hybrid subjectivity among identities like: victim offender, subjects in need of affection – surveillance. Here are presented the general aspects of the macro level analysis and the analysis of one institutional text named: “Parental guide for juvenile delinquents.”

Keywords

juvenile delinquency, subjectivity, Critical Psychology, Foucauldian Discourse Analysis

¹ Note: This analysis is an integral part of a broader master's thesis conducted in the Department of Psychology at the Aristotle University of Thessaloniki, under the title: "The Construction of Juvenile Delinquency: A Critical Discourse Analytic Approach to Scientific-Institutional Discourse and Volunteer Discourse."

1.Theoretical framework, purpose, methodological framework, and material of the analysis

This study analyzes the official "Parent Guide," a pamphlet distributed by Justice institutions (prosecution/juvenile supervision) in Greece to the parents of children involved within the criminal justice system. It does so from within the approach of Critical and Political Psychology and with the tools of Critical Foucauldian Discourse Analysis (Parker, 1990, 1992, 1999, 2002, 2005). The guide is a short illustrated booklet with "advice" for parents of "delinquents." Based on the Critical Discourse Psychology of Social Realism, the recommendations of the guide construct not only aspects of the subjectivities of juvenile delinquents and the way they are managed within the family, but also the type of parental subjectivity that the penal/legal institution "demands." Subjectivities are thus socially and politically constructed and regulated, while spontaneous ways of interaction between parents and delinquent children are pathologized and subject to political regulation by a primarily psychological discourse.

I first present a summary of the theoretical syntheses of Critical Discourse Psychology with Foucauldian theory and Marxism, along with the research questions and the methodology derived from them. Then, on the macro level, I show the first stage of the historical-genealogical analysis of juvenile delinquency, analyzing the dominant scientific Discourses of Governance of the concepts of "adolescence" and "juvenile delinquency." This is followed on the micro level by some indicative analyses from the "parent guide" of the Greek Ministry of Justice, accompanied by a relevant brief discussion.

1.1 Critical Discourse Psychology and Foucauldian Theory

It appears that the Critical Discourse Psychology adopted by Parker, while not negating a deconstructive dimension, does not deny that the framework of psychological research, the science of Psychology itself, and social reality, cannot be viewed apolitically. Moreover, the way they are viewed has a specific framework: "the real is constructed and mediated level by level by discourses, and always by Discourses that never escape the material conditions within which they are reproduced and transformed" (Parker, 1992: 38). Thus, Critical Discourse Psychology as both theory and method links every discourse-approach to its political dimension. This dimension concerns both the subjects-objects of study and the political subject of the researcher. Discourse, therefore, is never ideologically empty. This view of a representative of Critical Discourse Psychology is significant, since it chooses to incorporate Foucauldian theory into both ideological and Marxist analysis. Parker believes that Foucault's philosophy and analyses constitute the cornerstone of critical discourse analytic research (Parker, in: Boatzis&Dragonas, 2010: 295), as the deconstructive dimensions of Foucauldian work can highlight not only the dominant Discourses and power relations that Social Psychology investigates, but also the dominant Discourses

and power relations produced by Psychology and psychological research itself. Thus, the way in which the discipline (Foucault, 1987, 2011, 2016a) of subjects is achieved, it is examined not only within the internal discourse and its external reality, but also within the internal explanatory discourse that it analyzes/deconstructs. For Foucault, in every society, "the production of discourse is simultaneously controlled, selected, organized, and redistributed by a certain number of procedures, whose role is to avert its powers and dangers, to master the unpredictable, to avoid its heavy, formidable materiality. (...) these procedures are related to exclusion processes" (Foucault, n.d.: 7-8). Consistent with the social constructionism that followed historically, I argue that Foucault laid the foundations for Critical Discourse Analysis of a social constructionism that does not negate critical realism, when he writes: "Of course, the event is neither substance nor accident, neither quality nor process. The event does not belong to the order of corporeal things. Yet it is not immaterial at all. It acts, it has an effect only at the level of materiality" (Foucault, n.d.: 42).

1.1.1 Subjectivity in Foucault and Critical Social Psychology

The emphasis on the subject and its study is inextricably linked with Marxism and Post-Marxism. The extent to which discourse analytic research in Psychology concerning subjectivity and its construction can be combined with the ways of investigating subjectivity proposed by Michael Foucault is thus explored. Foucault established the view that subjectivity is connected to the social process: it is produced by and produces—constructs—the social through Discourse, seen not only as language, but as a broader verbal construction (Foucault, n.d., 1976, 1977, 1987, 2016 a, b). Thus, Discourse produces and is produced by power relations, contributing to the naturalization of ideologies and the reproduction of the dominant status quo. Subjectivity in this field, in its individual and collective dimension, appears destined to fail to reach "freedom."

In order to integrate this reasoning into the explanatory framework of Social Psychology, it should provide the possibility for both the analysis of the social and the conditions for its change. As Parker poses this issue, the use of different Discourses, even the production and (through psychological research) of counter-Discourses, cannot automatically lead to alternative social forms due to four factors (Parker 1992: 37-38):

- Direct physical coercion. The material conditions that objectively and naturally (according to Foucault) limit individuals and groups of social actors from producing new Discourses and thus new social conditions.
- The material organization of space. The institutional and deeply political structuring of spaces, where new Discourses can exist, be created, and articulated is a real force. There are specific sub-communities, where alternative and counter-Discourses have a foothold for existence.
- The habit of the individual (and therefore the researcher) to orient towards different – distinct - types of Discourse, making it difficult to radically 'break' the existing social structure.

- The pessimism about change reproduced by studies that view change through the "different subject positions" that subjects theoretically must or can (Parker 1992: 37) undertake. New subjectivities seem to depend purely on the narrow framework of Discourse.

According to my readings, this is reflected in Parker's works as a whole (where he often critiques other discourse approaches). No analysis based purely on, or predetermined by, rhetorical analytical concepts can itself enact change, except if it hypothesizes it. Parker's solution is clear: "The articulation of counter-Discourses will be achieved in material spaces" (Parker, 1992: 40). For the material space is part of Discourse.

Within this framework, it is recognized that the researcher should not be confined to these, but should dynamically incorporate analytical tools not only from dominant approaches, but also from approaches of other fields, when deemed necessary for research. However, it must first be clear that the analysis is ideological and operates in the political "arena." Thus, the adoption of a specific political perspective is deemed necessary.

1.1.2 Marxist and Post-Marxist Dimensions of Foucault's Thought and Their Relation to Discourse Psychology

The political commitment of social-psychological research is thus not only necessary, but inevitable. It is easily understood that Foucault's theory does not easily combine with many ideologies (e.g., neoliberal right-wing ideology). However, the question arises whether it can be combined with Marxism and Post-Marxism. The issue is not simple since Foucault himself seems to have denied any political designation, and his work has been fiercely criticized by Marxist analysts. Nonetheless, there are readings of his work that allow for the connection. Ping (2015) initiates a comparison between the two thinkers by juxtaposing the creation and goals of the traditional labor movement with those of the "new social movement" of "identity politics," with the latter, having Foucault's works as a basic theory, being accused (by the communist and broader left) of ignoring the oppressive power of productive relations and economic inequalities. Marxist and Foucaultian theory present similarities and differences, without implying that one excludes the other as a theoretical framework or method.

The similarities briefly concern issues of materialism, social processes, power, emancipation, and social resistance (Olssen, 2016; Ping, 2015). Foucault certainly does not consider that materialism dominates the social, but he admits that it overdetermines it, since Discourses have material consequences, and since material reality itself (which he does not deny) determines the production and function of Discourses. At the same time, economic relations of production have a place in his theory as they are part of the dominant power relations. Both Foucault and Marx consider that social practices are characterized by temporariness and transience and refer to the role of intellectuals and the

intelligentsia concerning social and productive relations (Olssen, 2016: 454). Both deal with issues of power, oppression, and emancipation.

This last observation, in its qualitative differentiations, is one of their main differences: for Marx, power always comes from economic relations of production and is oppressive, while for Foucault, it comes from other fields beyond the economic (cultural, intellectual, political) and is not necessarily oppressive, since it is combined with Knowledge and the concept of Discourse, which are inherent in every aspect of the social, whether oppressive or not. As Ping (2015) mentions, the concept of power in Foucault is not opposed to the Marxist one, but is simply broader, or – as mentioned in Olssen (2016) – overarching.

Another fundamental difference concerns the perception of history, which for Marx is determined by material relations of production and is imbued with the teleological victory of the working proletariat. In contrast, Foucault does not see an "end" (goal) in history, as this would contradict the dynamic notion of emancipation, resistance, and change. For him, history is characterized by the struggle of Discourses and Ideologies and by fragmentation (Ping, 2015). Finally, the concept of ideology, defined as "false consciousness" by Marx (Marx & Engels, 1974), is for Foucault a historical-cultural construction that is a plural (with post-Marxist influences), true based on social consequences, and dynamic while relating to the concept of the subject.

Therefore, as a method, as a historical approach, and as an analysis of social structures, the two theories present parallels (Olssen, 2016); thus a Foucauldian approach can be integrated into Marxist and post-Marxist frameworks of class struggle (Ping, 2015; Parker, 1992, 1993, 1999, 2002, 2007, 2010, 2015c, 2018). Moreover, Foucault himself had accepted the integration of Marxism into his work (Olssen, 2016: 454).

1.2 Theory of Juvenile Delinquency

The present paper constructs a "Theory" of juvenile delinquency through the study of the dominant approaches to childhood and adolescence, the dominant approaches to aggressive and antisocial behavior, the historical-genealogical critical presentation of the concept of delinquency and juvenile delinquency, and the dominant scientific Discourses governing the concept of juvenile delinquency. An attempt is made to briefly present how the dominant versions of these Discourses are articulated, constructing the body of knowledge that determines the theoretical, research, and practical reception of the collective subjectivity of juvenile delinquency in Greece. The main concepts related to juvenile delinquency and social control are also critically examined.

2. Research Questions

The specific research questions are as follows:

- What characteristics, processes, and Discourses appear to shape juvenile delinquency as subjectivity through the parental guide?
- How are classical scientific theories transformed through the psychological Discourse of the guide, and what power relations and ideologies do they seem to serve?
- In what subject positions are juvenile delinquents and their parents/guardians placed, and what are the consequences of these positions for theory and social and political practice?
- How and based on which systems of Discourse, are the causes and interventions for juvenile delinquency constructed? What consequences might this have for the social and political field?

3. Methodology

The methodological decisions pursuant to Critical Psychology and Critical Discourse Psychology, as well as to Social Realistic Constructivism, question the very existence of Psychology and its role in constructing reality, as well as see its socially and scientific existence in the admission of conscious political commitment (Parker, 1990b, 1992, 2002, 2005, 2015a, b, c, 2018). In the context of a proposed critical stance towards Psychology itself (both in general and integrated into psychological research), Psychology, may not be identified with ideology (in all texts), but it is considered to function ideologically (Parker 2018: 20) and thus constitutes a "pseudo-science" (Parker 2018: 21) that exercises social control.

For Parker (both in his early – Parker, 1992 – and later work – Parker, 2005), the project of emancipation and social change aligns with the project of Deconstruction in how current qualitative methods of psychological research can be used to deconstruct ideology and social control (Parker 2018: 89, 286). For Parker, this deconstruction has classic elements of deconstructive criticism, but also discursive analysis in terms of knowledge-power. As he writes: "The real is mediated step by step by Discourses that never completely transcend the material conditions within which they are constructed and transformed" (Parker, 1992: 38). In this context, the classic Psychological Discourse concerning criminality/delinquency promotes the neglect of the social and political factors that construct and determine it. These factors can be highlighted through the methodological coupling of Marx and Foucault, which promotes a Critical Anti-Psychology and emphasizes knowledge that will not a priori empower psychologists nor validate institutional processes under the guise of supposed psychological normality.

In agreement with Parker's view on the free yet documented choice of methodological tools for analysis), the present analysis constructs its the methodological tool for analysis as follows: Norman Fairclough's triple dimension for CDA was adopted as the general analytical classification, and specific elements of Foucauldian analysis, deconstructive criticism, and Bakhtinian method were selectively integrated into it.

3.1 Methodological Tool Construction

According to the above, the methodological analysis paradigm demands systematicity and flexibility and consists of a combination of methodological proposals from the writings of Foucault himself, and the interpretations for Foucauldian methodology expressed by Parker and Willig. Furthermore, the analysing tool is enriched with theories of Fairclough, Bakhtin, and Derrida, showing that a synthetical, systematic, but also critical Foucauldian approach to analysis is possible. Parker, Fairclough, and Jaeger themselves make clear references to their Foucauldian influences (Parker, 1992, 2005. Fairclough, 1994. Jaeger, 1993).

Taking as a starting point his own analyses in relation to psychiatric power, Foucault writes: "The aim is a genealogy of the contemporary scientific-judicial complex, from which punitive power draws its supports, rationales, and rules, and where it extends its effects and conceals its excessive peculiarities" (Foucault, 2016d: 316). He thus integrates the historical-genealogical method as the background for the analysis of bodies of knowledge, of governances that co-construct institutional processes and therefore the subjectivities produced by them. The concept of the "scientific-judicial complex" illustrates how the Discourses of the individual sciences (here: Law, Psychology, Sociology, Pedagogy, Psychiatry) have structured the philosophy and practices of the administration of criminal justice. They constitute a "complex," a Discourse with institutional power that co-constructs/is imprinted in practices (here: official texts/voluntary interventions by private entities) that adopt and often reframe the dominant individual scientific paradigms. Close to the genealogical approach, Foucault adds the necessity of the archaeological and linguistic approach, an "inside" of the text before the "outside" of it. In the above passage, the points of influence of the approaches developed in the previous three subchapters are evident.

There have been attempts by Social Psychology to systematize Foucauldian traditions to serve both the respective research purposes and the training of psychologists/analysts. Parker (1992, 2002, 2005, 2015c), for one, attempted to systematize Foucauldian imperatives, being consistent with the degree of freedom of ambiguity they entail, but also trying to transcend it, as seen above. Similarly, Carla Willig (2013: 318-324) presents six stages of Foucauldian analysis: 1) The 'Analysis of Discourse Structures,' essentially concerning textual analysis and exploration of explicit and implicit references in relation to the object of discourse (namely research). 2) The 'Analysis of Discourses,' identifying the ways in which the object of discourse is embedded within broader discourses and how this operates in its construction. 3) The stage of 'Action Orientation,' examining the functioning in practice of construction and which type of discourse benefits from it. 4) The stage of 'Positionings,' investigating subject positions. 5) The stage of 'Practice,' demonstrating how discourse constructions determine what can be said and happen in specific realities. 6) The stage of 'Subjectivity.' According to Willig, here the construction of social realities and subjectivities is explored through the combination of linguistic

constructions with consequences for subjectivity. Willis emphasizes that this stage has the highest degree of 'speculation' (Willig, 2013: 329) and that the stages do not constitute a complete Foucauldian analysis. Regarding the latter, the author refers to the methods of Parker and Fairclough (Willig, 2013: 330). Parker (1992, 2002, 2005, 2010) specifically argues that any methodological choice incorporating the historical-political and the deconstructive can be considered Foucauldian. Although Hook (2001: 2) criticizes Potter and Wetherell's approach as well as Parker, he argues that Parker and Fairclough have "come closer."

In "What is Critique?" (2016a), Foucault himself presents the steps of the critical-genealogical analysis he proposes: 1) Initially, the analyst takes sets of empirical elements and connects them with mechanisms of constraint and the contents of Knowledge/Reason. (Foucault, 2016a: 32) 2) At each moment of the analysis, he assigns specific contents corresponding to elements of Knowledge and mechanisms of power (there is no one knowledge or one power). (Foucault provides the example of the interweaving of scientific discourses: Legal, Psychiatry, etc.) (Foucault, 2016a: 34). 3) Researchers do not analyze the object as a universal concept but as a singularity. Thus, they develop a dense causal network through genealogy that reveals the conditions of the emergence of singularity. (Foucault, 2016a: 37). 4) The relative Reasons (e.g., scientific) operate in relationships involving subjectivities, for the analysis of which the analyst needs strategies that will reveal how the Reasons established as Power-Knowledge, on the one hand, construct singularities/subjectivities, while, on the other hand, make them open ("fragile") to change.

Thus, Critical Discourse Analysis consists in revealing the results of power in a sense-subject. In what sense "(...) is the knowledge of what are the results of power, if you will, of induction (...) which this theorem can have, on the one hand, within the scientific field, within which it is shaped by someone - mathematicians, psychiatry, etc. - and on the other hand, what are the institutional, non-discursive, non-standardizable networks of power with which it is connected and from which it is put into circulation" (Foucault, 2016a: 61). For Foucault, such criticism is therefore inevitably political. It is "(...) the art of voluntary disobedience, of profound disobedience. Critique in the service of de-subjectification, in the game of what we could call with one word, the politics of truth" (Foucault, 2016a: 16).

Parker (Parker, 1992: 4-20) proposes ten criteria (he calls the last three "auxiliary") for identifying Discourses; these are accompanied by twenty specific techniques (two for each criterion) that the critical discourse analyst must follow. Briefly listed the criteria are:

Criterion 1: Discourse is realized in texts; criterion 2: Discourse concerns objects; criterion 3: Discourse contains subjects; criterion 4: Discourse is a coherent system of meanings; criterion 5: Discourse refers to other Discourses; criterion 6: Discourse reflects its own way of speaking; criterion 7: Discourse has historical placement; criterion 8: Discourses support institutions; criterion 9: Discourses reproduce power relations; criterion 10: Discourses have ideological consequences.

As already mentioned, Parker himself (1992, 2005, 2015a, b, c) refers to Norman Fairclough's paradigm of critical discourse analysis, which, when combined with a Foucauldian method-interpretation of analysis, can constitute a systematic critical discourse analysis. At the same time, he mentions that the political-ideological element in the analysis does not negate its deconstructive nature, insofar as the researcher who deconstructs has already positioned themselves as a research-political subject.

Norman Fairclough adopts the Althusserian conception of ideology, accepting that ideology is inherent in institutions and social practices as "common sense," so as to naturalize them (Fairclough, 1989: 77-98, 102-109). This naturalization of common sense, that is, socially constructed knowledge and evaluations, presents itself as natural and contributes to the construction of the subject's identity, creating a variety of "subject positions" that are adopted through the manipulation of various kinds of discourses (Fairclough, 1989: 102-105). In his effort to establish a method for discourse analysis, he defines discourse as text, interaction, and social context, thus, based on this definition, he formulates three stages/dimensions of critical discourse analysis (Fairclough, 1989: 109-150, 1995: 98ff., Perpiraki, 2019):

1. Text analysis: This involves primarily a linguistic analysis of texts at the first stage, as it is based on Fairclough's position that the formal characteristics of texts are nothing more than choices (lexical and grammatical) within a range of possibilities. The choices are linked to ideology, just as the form of the text is linked to its content. Vocabulary, grammar, and textual structures are examined based on a tripartite system of linguistic values: experiential, relational, and expressive value.

2. Discourse practice analysis: This examines the interpretation between textual practice and discourse practice, the processes of production, distribution, and consumption of discourse, with emphasis on the concept of intertextuality. Additionally, the type of discourse is examined at the levels of content (what is happening, topic, purpose), subject (who is involved), relations (what relationships are involved among those participating in the discourse), connections (what role does language play in action), contexts, and schemata.

3. Sociocultural practice analysis: This focuses on the nature of discourse production (e.g., at the level of institutions such as education). It examines the relationship between discourse practices and sociocultural practices, i.e., how the former relate to analyses of power and ideology relations.

Next, I present those aspects of deconstruction and Bakhtinian theory that can be incorporated into the analysis connected to the peculiarities of the present research.

According to Bakhtin, the word is an ideological point both in form and content. It has a dialectical character (Voloshinov, 1998: 86) and never leads to singular representations, which led Bakhtin to express for the first time the view that "there are many ideologies." In a view that closely resembles that formulated later by Billig (1991), Bakhtin argued for the "ideology of everyday life" and the "ideology of constituted formations" (Voloshinov, 1998: 75). Interestingly, Bakhtin considers ideology and its exploration as the work of psychology, while

also providing a definition of Social Psychology: "Ideology is explained through Psychology, not vice versa, through the sign material of the soul: word, speech, enunciation" (Voloshinov, 1998: 95) and "Social Psychology is manifested primarily in the various forms of 'enunciation,' in forms of small kinds of speech, internal and external, which have not been studied until now" (Voloshinov, 1998: 80). He also takes a clear position on the analysis of Speech-Ideology: "Methodological position: the study of ideologies in no way depends on Psychology, nor can it be based on it. Instead, it is Objective Psychology that must rely on the science of ideologies. The reality of ideological phenomena is the objective reality of social points" (Voloshinov, 1998: 68). For Bakhtin, therefore, Language has material reality, is never neutral, and is organized into types of Speech that connect the history of Language with the history of Society (Bakhtin, 2014: 9, 37, 39, 71, 79. Voloshinov, 1998. Holquist, 2014).

The Bakhtinian conceptual tools that derive for the methodology of the present study concern the concepts "chronotope," "dialogism," and "enunciation." The "chronotope" is related to the genres of speech and the composition of stories and narratives. It focuses on the spatial and temporal indices of the text, as these - according to Bakhtin - can distort the sequence of events (Holquist, 2014: 203).

Here, it is necessary to refer to Holquist's (2014) view that Bakhtin and Foucault complement each other regarding the imperatives of discourse analysis: Both recognize that discourse has material consequences and constructs subjectivities based on power and capitalism, with the difference that Bakhtin thoroughly described the analysis within the text, and Foucault in the realm "outside the text." Finally, in relation Derrida's textual analysis theory, the deconstructive perspective dismantles the dichotomy of literal meaning and metaphor, stating that every naming of a thing, every signifying, is inherently a metaphor, since between the thing and what it signifies the point intervenes with its difference. Derrida associated this relationship with the issue of identity and the relationship between self and Other (Culler, 2003: 292). Thus, the critic does not stop by describing a metaphor in discourse and its function, finds the "metaphorical root" of literal propositions. Therefore, discourse is essentially metaphorical, and every text is, in a sense, a form of literature. As interpreted by their writings, Derrida himself, as well as biographies of Foucault, acknowledge that the two philosophers agree on the premise of critical analysis, with the difference that Derrida emphasizes the text more, Foucault focuses on what happens outside the text. In some way, they complement each other.

The use of these concepts and approaches is not only concordant, but also necessary for this research, especially for a critical Foucauldian analysis of discourse. On the one hand, it aligns with the viewpoints of Parker, Foucault, and Fairclough regarding a deconstructive premise. On the other hand, it challenges the methodological perception that demands Foucauldian analyses to neglect linguistic aspects and leave linguistic structures "vacant," which underestimates the role of the text as language.

4. Genealogy and Dominant Discourses

In this subsection, I present and explore the historical-genealogical and institutional formation of the concept of juvenile delinquency as a category in discourse and practice with Foucauldian terms, associated with the construction of the concepts of deviance in general and transgression. Initially, the formation of punishment and punitive practices was examined in a genealogical dimension. Since the political structure of the ancient Greek city-state, specific forms of control and regulation of the behaviour of certain individuals and groups can be identified and named "governance" in Foucauldian terms. These practices seek to regulate and guide the conduct and behaviour of those who evade or challenge authority, or ignore both written and unwritten laws. Foucault considers that the beginning of the study of the formation of punitive practices may include the study of the concept of exclusion, in its broad sense as a socially consensual rejection. Historically, specific linguistic-identitary characteristics were attributed to the excluded, such as "deviant," "maladjusted," "abnormal," etc., which were imbued with purely psychological content, introducing Psychological Discourse into social control informally. Thus, as Foucault says, this early Psychological Discourse aimed to "conceal the techniques, processes, mechanisms through which society excluded certain individuals to later approach them as abnormal, deviants" (Foucault, 2016d: 16). In this process, historically shaped punitive practices played a dominant role, which constructed the very concept and content of what is understood as "punishment."

Foucault himself analyzes the genesis and functioning of four punitive practices historically: exclusion (ostracism, exile, etc.), which imposed the break with any social bond an individual had with society; redemption/restitution (monetary compensation, etc.), which constructed a separate social network of obligations for the individual; stigma (literal and symbolic), which made the punishment visible, attempting to eliminate it by highlighting it; and practices of confinement (e.g., imprisonment) and death penalty, which evolved into practices of "correction" and "therapy." From a social constructionist perspective, and in accordance with Foucauldian theory, every punitive practice, both at the level of Discourse and in material terms, constructs and corresponds to criminal systems and the related social systems. Thus, the stakes are the historical and synchronic study of the power relations behind each punitive practice. In this way, "penal tactics are the analysts of power relations, not simply indicators of an ideology" (Foucault, 2016d: 26). The entire penal and social system that creates, imposes, and uses punitive practices is permeated by a series of discourses or "rationalities" that are transformed into scientific discourses (sociological, legal, psychological, psychiatric, educational). These, in turn, are historically related to the very formation of the subject that is to be regulated: the criminal, the transgressor, the delinquent.

4.1 The delinquent as a "Social Enemy"

According to Foucault (1976, 2016d), until the 18th century, prohibited criminal acts were characterized by individualization, while from the mid-18th century on, crime was considered an act that harms not only specific individuals or interests, but the entire society. Delinquents were thus constructed as individuals "waging war" against society, as social enemies. The framework of punishments and punitive practices imposed on them was thus considered a "counter-war measure" for the protection of society. The facets of the "social enemy" were and are intertwined with what was considered not only as a crime, but also as the cause of crime. In this dimension, Foucault presents historical analyses of the causes that generate crime and the delinquent/social enemy through Psychological Discourses. The emphasis is psycholinguistic since these Discourses primarily concern the semantic functions of linguistic terms. He therefore considers the psychological starting point for the construction of the concept of criminality to be the content attributed to the word "vagrancy." He identifies its construction around the analysis of psychological "dispositions" such as laziness, begging, and poverty. The concept of laziness is defined as the "basic matrix" from which the beginning of crimes originates.

It could perhaps be argued that Foucault distinguishes between the individual dimension of analysis in Social Psychology and a more "social" or group-oriented analysis, when he says that "later a new content appeared for crime, 'the set of tramps,' that is, a type of common life, a social group presented as an anti-society in contrast to laziness, which in Psychology was something like an individual sin" (Foucault, 2016a: 53). Initially, "vagrancy" as a characteristic of the social enemy was defined in psychological terms; later, in the 18th and 19th century, the analysis of criminality appeared also in economic terms of production/consumption. Thus, the social enemies were constituted through their relationship with the productive process, and the criterion was whether and why, and under what terms, they had employment. The notion of employment gradually introduced the concept of correction and the concept of "rehabilitation of the delinquent," which – as I will show – applies today. The very initial signification of correction was defined, in contrast to the unemployed/unemployed social enemy, as "the habit of work" (Foucault, 2016d: 71). Correction itself was based on work as the organization of the "working time" of prisoners as well as those under judicial supervision or care, which structures the subject transgressor within the relationship between lifetime and political/institutional power. In this process, the development of the capitalist economic system played a role in transforming time and its management into an economic and ethical measure (Foucault, 2016d: 82).

4.2 The Sociological and Psychological Construction of the Offender and the Research Dimensions of "Deviant" Subjectivity

Foucault distinguishes a gradual sociological construction of the criminal as a social enemy. This entails the formation of socio-psychological discourses that result, in penal practices, in the creation of new scientific fields of knowledge, such as the "psychopathology of deviance" and the "sociology of criminality." Thus, a "Sociology of minor and major criminality" is established, which concerns the study of the social mechanisms that underpin criminality and its management, as well as methods of suppression and intervention. This kind of a Sociology of deviance defines the offender both theoretically and executively, and the ambiguity as well as the conversation of these dimensions led Foucault to introduce the notion of the "mechanism of alternation": "The offender-criminal-enemy is an element that cannot be precisely located either in one framework (theory) or in the other (practice). He is a transcriber, a switcher, a mechanism of alternation (...) he ensures the coherence and relative systematicity of heterogeneous elements: penal practice, theory of criminal law, codes, psychiatric, sociological discourse" (Foucault, 2016d: 47-49 footnote). Here, Foucault makes it clear that research on the governance and subjectivities constructed by penal practices cannot be the subject of classical sociological and criminological theory. Likewise, he considers that the psychological construction cannot be understood only within the field of its articulation, that is, Psychology. He writes: "Similarly: to the extent that the sociology of criminality describes, in its vocabulary, the practice of criminal prosecution on the basis of the switcher (criminal-enemy), it becomes clear that psychological theory will never be able to deeply reassess penal practice, whatever criticism is levelled against it" (Foucault, 2016d: 49 footnote). Foucault appears to reject positivist-empirical psychological theory and research. He suggests analysing subjectivities constructed by the penal system: "The nature of the struggles surrounding power in society must be revealed" (Foucault, 2016d: 27). This process involves the analysis of the conjunction of the judicial-institutional model and the biopolitical model of power (Foucault, 2016d: 292). At the analytical level, the concepts of "Discourse" and "Civil War" are thus surfaced.

4.2.1 "Civil War" - Discourse and Socio-Psychological Practices for Understanding Deviance and Delinquency

Foucault elevates the concept of "Civil War" to an epistemological model consisting of individual and social dimensions. In this model, subjects are collective, and social processes reveal and construct new collective subjectivities through conflicts at the level of power struggles. Thus, the socio-psychological practice of studying punishment at the level of tactics and the construction of subjectivities must examine, "not who punishes (the system) and with what scale of values, but: how it punishes, whom, and with what tools" (Foucault, 2016d: 31), starting from the study of the conflict covered by the notion of "civil war,"

which - as explicitly stated - is the social war of the rich against the poor and equated with class warfare (Foucault, 2016d: 43 footnote). This war is a war against the dominant society, characterized by two dimensions: the theoretical production of how the social contract and civil war (class conflict) lead to crime; and the institutional production concerning the establishment of persons and laws that will assign the function of the "social enemy" to the subject. This, following Marxist assumptions, occurs through the dominant class. It transfers and naturalizes the function of excluding the offender into social consciousness, either through the judicial system or through the "epistemological transmitters" (Foucault, 2016d: 45) of dominant scientific discourses. In this process, the social enemy is constantly reconstituted according to penal practices. These may involve displacement, imprisonment, rehabilitation, or "new therapeutic measures," as will be seen later. Thus, punishment and the penal process are social constructions that are structured in two dimensions: relativity (what is socially and culturally defined as punishment) and gradation (the punishment that either "neutralizes" or reintegrates the offender into the social contract). This shapes a social "geography of crime," where one can be considered either a criminal, innocent, or victim, without an "intermediate" or simultaneous condition.

Foucault provocatively raises the significant dimension presented in socio-psychological theories regarding the causes of deviance, which concerns the extreme of the "innately" or "morally fallen" offender. Of interest is how the thinker wonders whether the offender/social enemy is simply a construction operating in the field of social representations: "Is it perhaps the establishment of a dominant representation or a dominant system of representation? Could the criminal be represented as an enemy?" (Foucault, 2016d: 65).

4.3 Genealogy and Construction of Juvenile Delinquency

The historical and social shaping of juvenile delinquency as a societal category and discourse category is a complex phenomenon with deep roots. Scholars (Abdella, 2013; Benveniste, 1994; Ritter, 1999; Shore, 2011) trace the term "juvenile delinquency" back to 18th century Britain (1776). It first appeared in British texts in 1815, describing concerns about the increase in criminality. Initially, the term seemed to refer to criminal, unlawful activities observed in "young men." Socially and informally, it did not seem to apply -at first- to women, and it did not exclusively refer to minors since it lacked clear age specification. It could also be argued that the term excluded accountability for children, as the contemporary notion of childhood did not include criminal responsibility. The broader term of "youth delinquent responsibility," according to Ritter (1999), is a construction that articulates reasons related to age and behaviour. It is a historical product of the Enlightenment, during which attempts were made to rationalize behaviour with a stake in its management. Initially, the emphasis was placed on the content of the term, focusing on "proper youth upbringing" and the "salvation of deviants."

Studies (Abdella, 2013; Ritter, 1999; Platt, 1969) concur that "juvenile delinquency was invented as a distinct social phenomenon in late 19th-century England" (Abdella, 2013: 51). This invention is part of a broader "turn towards utility" and the perception that state authority should intervene in anything that socially impedes the development of common interests within the framework of the early stages of capitalist ideology. The move away from theocratic modes of thinking and secularization mandated a society capable of "defending itself" (Ritter, 1999: 1). At the same time, the rise of liberal ideology emphasized, within the context of the penal state, the notion of individual characteristics, abilities, and rights within the social contract, guaranteed by the imperatives of laws. In this context, even before the establishment of official "Juvenile Justice," those with an interest in defending the social contract—credible civilians, government officials, social reformers, and philanthropists (Abdella, 2013: 52), who were mainly women (Platt, 1969)—began to show interest in behaviours characterized as "deviant" by children and adolescents. The interest of these individuals and groups had clear class characteristics and contributed to the initial construction of minors as institutional subjects.

As Abdella notes, "government officials and philanthropists changed the criteria and definitions of illegal behaviour and invented a new social category: juvenile delinquents" (Abdella, 2013: 52). This new category had to be invested with scientific explanations from the fields of Statistics, Psychiatry, Psychology, Pedagogy, and Sociology (Panagiotopoulos, 1998, 2013) in order to be established as "knowledge." Simultaneously, discourses about childhood and youth had already imposed some restrictions on this peculiar legal status for children. As early as 1908, the prohibition of the death penalty and imprisonment of children had been structured in the construction of various, often conflicting discourses. Ritter (1999: 1-5) identifies five dominant discourses regarding the emerging institutional-penal management of deviant children and youth, summarizing them as follows:

1. Deviance deserves reciprocation.
2. Dangerous actors require control.
3. Vulnerable subjects need protection.
4. Embryonic social subjects require love.
5. Public nuisances call for state intervention.

These discourses construct socially and discursively the juvenile delinquent subject, which would become the object of study for a plethora of institutional-governmental as well as private bodies (eg. philanthropic organizations) with the goal of finding techniques of "governance" permeated by common characteristics: prevention, deterrence, allocation of responsibility between the state, community, and family, and the pursuit of the "appropriate balance between moral reform and physical punishment, between care and control" (Abdella, 2013: 55). It is noteworthy that the management of juvenile delinquency followed the historical establishment of adulthood, in a context where the creation of "reforming" institutions for juveniles preceded the creation of juvenile courts and juvenile justice (Abdella, 2013; Foucault, 1976, 1977, 1987, 2011, 2016b, 2017; Panagiotopoulos, 1998; Ritter, 1999). These institutions were

created for children with clear class origins: from 1880, juvenile delinquents were described as a class that could potentially become dangerous and costly to society (Ritter, 1999), based on the behaviour exhibited by the subjects included in it.

Certainly, this class bias was initially observed within the urban environment of large cities. It was the groups of children from poor environments and city neighbourhoods who were to be controlled, not the "poor countryside." The aforementioned discourses and processes led to a series of consequences regarding the management of the issue. Until 1974, the use of the terms "reciprocation" and "retribution" led to the expansion of physical punishment of juveniles (mainly through whipping) in Britain and in other European countries. The concept of dangerous juvenile behavior was articulated with the management of private property, as a majority of juvenile offences involved theft. This initiated the creation of a "rhetoric of panic," which essentially expressed the concern of the urban class for a specific social class of children. This panic was invested with moral evaluations, so that it transformed into a kind of "moral panic" (Ritter, 1999). The discourse that wanted juvenile delinquents to be "objects in need of protection" (note the objectification and influence of Enlightenment ideas here) constructed the subjects of juvenile delinquency as "victims," "vulnerable," and "helpless" children. The immediate consequence was their removal from the social whole and their isolation, using arguments related to both their own future and the future of society. They would cease to come into contact with delinquent influences and society itself would be protected from the spread of "moral contamination" (Platt, 1969; Ritter, 1999).

These perceptions laid the groundwork for a scientific-institutional dialogue between welfare and judicial treatment, which continues to this day (Abdella, 2013; Kourakis, 2004, 2009, 2011; Panagiotopoulos, 1998; Ritter, 1999). As it did with adult offenders (Foucault, 1976, 2016b, 2017), the concept of "reformation" emerged here, which was associated with the age and developmental psychological category of adolescence. At the same time, the psychological and psychiatric discourse medicalized and pathologized behaviors attributed to the adolescent age category. Thus, "seen as a disorder, adolescence became the age at which the need for guidance and protection became crucial to avoid multiple risks, primarily the risk of moral deviation and criminal behavior" (Abdella, 2013: 60). In the late 19th and early 20th centuries, this discourse began to delineate "who has the right" to study and manage juvenile delinquency. Based on the dialectical relationship between welfare and justice described in theoretical and research texts, I argue that juvenile delinquency was constructed historically, institutionally, and scientifically through the scientific and institutional "representatives" of "two poles": Regarding "welfare" treatment, the sciences of Psychology, Psychiatry, and Pedagogy, along with urban philanthropic organizations, attempted to "cure" delinquent juveniles who, although having "good intentions" (Ritter, 1999), had deviated due to "vulnerability." On the other hand, criminal-justice intervention intervened to preserve the material and moral "good" of individuals (the offenders themselves) and society. This tension between justice and welfare contributed to the

establishment of "special juvenile courts." These two poles seem to have been particularly incorporated into the recognition of welfare as a means of dispensing justice, with the latter being considered to lead to measures that "reform." All this was integrated into the processes that accompanied the emergence of welfare states in Europe.

The "good intentions of children"-scenario played a significant role in welfare rhetoric and was linked to the discourse on vulnerable adolescents. According to Ritter (1999), the construction of children's vulnerability shifted moral responsibility to the realm of the family and social class background. As will be shown in the following subsections, this discourse also gave rise to the idea of rehabilitation as a therapeutic measure, counselling, family support, and the establishment of "Parent Schools." I argue that this discourse is connected with the generalization of providing "psychological support services." Later on, the discourse of vulnerability was framed within the philosophy of social determinism, shifting the problematic from the family to the broader social context, correlating juvenile delinquency with poverty and urbanization. As Ritter (1999: 8) argues, this discourse operates self-fulfillingly to objectify juveniles into the perpetrator-victim dichotomy. If they refuse the role of the victim, they are considered a threat. This construction coexists with discourses/constructions that portray juveniles as property of parents, as apolitical, asexual, economically dependent subjects in need of regulation through education. Ritter also refers to ideologies in the dimension of bourgeois and Marxist readings of juvenile delinquency. She argues that bourgeois views consider juvenile delinquents as "Others," while Marxist readings view them as victims. I consider this interpretation to be incorrect. In my view, a Marxist reading of the historical and conceptual trajectory of juvenile delinquency concerns the way in which the forces of production determine the social fate of children, which determines whom society chooses to construct as delinquent. In this dimension, the delinquent subject is not considered a victim, but a consequence of the capitalist mode of organizing production. This reveals the stake in the choice of words, as the word "victim" theoretically anchors representations on the axis of the individual and lack of responsibility.

In the conceptualization of juvenile delinquency, the 20th century saw the inclusion of both the religious mandates of Christian discourse and child-centric pedagogical views, as well as of psychoanalytic discourse, thus constructing juvenile delinquency as a collective identity of embryonic social subjects whose emotional needs for love were not met. This perception led to a series of reformatory programs emphasizing "love" and criticizing the strict punitive-judicial system of juvenile justice. This critique, during the last decade of the 20th century, resulted in the formation of two opposing views regarding the criminal management of juvenile delinquency and the application of juvenile justice: On the one hand, it was considered to violate the rights of children; on the other hand, it was seen as showing unjustified leniency and flexibility with serious offences (Abdela, 2013: 99).

It seems, therefore, that historically, the construction of juvenile delinquency in the Western world was both provoked by – and provoked changes

in – the relationships between the state and individuals, as well as changes in the dialectic between institutions and scientific theory, constituting, in my opinion, one of the first fields that “demanded” “specialized knowledge of specialists.” All of the above are not relationships and processes devoid of ideology. It has been argued, therefore, that juvenile delinquency is a cultural, social, and political construct (Abdela, 2013: 100, Panagiotopoulos, 1998). It, itself, is a construction in discourse with material consequences, but it has also shaped a wide field of discourse-approaches that have determined the formation of the body of knowledge and thus the construction of truth. As Abdela states: "Thus, an increasingly wider discursive field is formed where different processes for 'juvenile delinquency,' its management, and prevention intersect, with a common characteristic: that they are not formulated as opinion but presented as knowledge. They thus claim authority." (Abdela, 2013: 80)

4.3.1 The Historical Formation of Juvenile Delinquents in Greece

According to historians (Abdela, 2013; Karouzou, 2010; Benveniste, 1994), juvenile delinquency was not constructed as a specific social class/category, but rather as a category of disobedient children based on behaviors that caused problems. Initially, the main problem was the groups of children engaging in unlawful activities in the cities of Athens and Thessaloniki, similar to the rest of Europe. In Greece as well, mobilization for the interpretation and management of these groups began with women, who organized in philanthropic associations, and some state representatives, primarily legal professionals (Benveniste, 1994). Abdela (2013) discerns behind these actions the formation of bourgeois hegemony in the care of poor children, which led to the formation of the "domestic ideal" (Abdela, 2013: 103). According to this ideal, the "house," the home where the nuclear family resides, and where the first moral upbringing is given by the mother, constitutes the field for shaping the characters of those who will either become criminals or not. Both references to historical-sociological analyses (Abdela, 2013; Karouzou, 2010; Benveniste, 1994) and my contact with archival texts showed that in Greece, until relatively recently (the 1990s), the term "criminal" was used to describe minors referred to the criminal justice system. The prevailing terms seemed to be "young criminals" and "juvenile criminals." According to the data (Abdela, 2013: 108), institutions in Greece used these terms even though the internationally proposed term was "juvenile delinquent." According to Benveniste (1994), in the 19th century, Greece had not created a distinct judicial and correctional system for minors; however, minors were treated - depending on the offence - like juvenile delinquents in the rest of Europe. A key differentiating characteristic for the Greek reality was the overrepresentation of Legal Discourse on the issue (Abdela, 2013; Benveniste, 1994). It is striking that even contemporary research on the issue initially emanates predominantly from legal science and only subsequently from other fields.

The absence of the use of the term "delinquent" in relation to minors led to the Greek construction of the subject "youth at risk" (Abdela, 2013: 116), a collective subjectivity that did not only concern "delinquent minors," but also other young people considered to be "at risk" (Abdelah, 2013; Georgoulas, 2000; Pitsela, 2006, 2013). This shaped the framework for the construction of the concept. As will be shown later, legal discourse incorporated psychiatric discourse for juvenile delinquency. Today, the specialization and expansion of psychiatric practices lead to an increasing production of psychiatric discourse for juvenile delinquency.

In Greece, the management of juvenile delinquents was not only a state affair, but also a matter of private philanthropic initiative. In 1921, the "Association for Women's Rights" was the private entity that first advocated for the establishment of juvenile courts (Abdelah, 2013:118). The relevant law (5098/31) "on juvenile courts" was passed in 1931, but abolished during the Metaxas regime. The relevant law imposed by the Metaxas dictatorship was more punitive, and the linguistic choices indicate the regime's perception of juvenile delinquents, as the use of the word "crime" was reintroduced. During that period, according to Abdela (2013), scientific discourses of Psychology, Psychiatry, Pedagogy, and Theology were introduced into the dialogue, providing a range of classifications regarding the social and psychological characteristics of juvenile delinquents. These classifications emphasized the biopsychological interpretations of adolescence and the psychiatric-biological model. This led to the construction of the dominant scientific field of Positivist Criminology, which is a branch of criminology and legal discourse until today (Abdela, 2013; Georgoulas, 2000). These processes naturalized the identity of the "juvenile offender" within legal science, gradually forming the distinct branch of "Juvenile Criminal Law," initially referred to as "Juvenile Criminological Law," which, apart from punitive measures, also provided purely educational measures. Despite the dominance of the legal field, there is a need for educational and psychological regulatory principles for both juvenile delinquents and "at-risk" adolescents. As a result of this, in 1940, the operation of Reformatories was introduced in Greece by an Emergency Law (Anangastikos Nomos), while the provisions for the admission of children to them did not necessarily require a prior criminal offence. Many children were admitted to Reformatories because their behavior was observed to pose the "risk" of delinquency. In both discourse and in material reality, this concept of "delinquent risk" thus created the category of pre-delinquency.

The role of sciences, particularly Psychology, is not detached or innocent in this construction. According to sources (Abdelah, 2013; Kazolea-Tavoulari, 2002), during the academic year 1948-49, the first academic course that articulated Positivist Criminology and Psychology was taught at the University of Athens by a legal pioneer in the formation of Juvenile Law under the title "Criminological Psychology"; the course was later renamed "Psychology" by the same professor. Based on the above, I believe that in Greece, the construction of juvenile delinquency was initially a product of legal-criminological discourse, while its establishment as a field of knowledge was associated with both

Psychology and Psychiatry. The direct consequence was the naturalization of the legal-psychological discourse of Positivism in explaining, managing, and studying this new subjectivity. Legal Discourse required the assistance of traditional Developmental Psychology to lend credibility to the analyses, imperatives, and regulatory provisions concerning juvenile delinquents. Thus, I argue that these legal provisions never had purely punitive character but – from their inception – constituted discourses that sought to entirely control the so-called delinquent subjects. The articulation of these scientific discourses would subsequently dominate both in action and in the formal procedures of the institutions established to manage the subjectivity of delinquency.

The Juvenile Protection Societies (JPS), an institution that exists until today, were established in the late 1930s, with a branch in each court of first instance. They consisted of multiple, distinct departments that divided the terms of supervision and intervention for juveniles. Staffed by both paid employees and volunteers (predominantly women), who worked as juvenile caretakers, their main purpose was to conduct "psycho-biological" research (later renamed as "social research") to complete the "psycho-biological record" of the juvenile (Abdela, 2013: 135). These caretakers, as volunteers, were not required to have specific academic qualifications; most of them were either legal professionals or lacked academic training. As Abdelah's historical research demonstrates, in most cases, juvenile delinquency was perceived in terms of danger and "moral risk" by the JPS themselves, often linked to right-wing and conservative ideologies.

Sources also indicate that during the Civil War period personnel from the Child Protection Societies (CPS) undertook the "national upbringing" of children sent to the orphanages of Queen Frederica. These institutions had a clear anti-communist and nationalist ideology focused on "reformation." After the war, in 1954, the Youth Guardianship Service (YGS) was established as an institution to support judicial work. The duties of this service, as well as those of the youth guardians, have shown minor differences to this day, as they relate to the current legal framework surrounding juvenile delinquency. However, from a historical-ideological and critical perspective, it is noteworthy that their work was defined by a professional dimension and scientific rationale, distinguishing it from the purely voluntary work of the CPS. Since then, the institution has combined welfare and punitive care, mediating between judicial decisions and the determination of interventions for minors. The institutions, procedures, and ideological-political conflicts between institutions and volunteers are extensively detailed in the work of Abdela (2013). In very broad terms, the key institutions I have chosen to present here regulate the construction and the punitive and social fate of juvenile delinquents up to the present day. Their basic characteristics include the integration of scientific Discourses among the state and individuals, professionals, and volunteers, 'experts', and 'unskilled'. Finally, it is worth mentioning the pivotal shift from the 'moral danger' of the 'teddy boys' to the pathologization and condemnation of family functioning through the establishment of Psychology and Psychiatry as adjuncts to Legal scientific Discourses. Psychological explanations laid the groundwork for shifting from "delinquent behavior" to "antisocial behavior" (which was considered to breed

delinquency). As research concludes, the focus from the 1960s onwards shifted to the consequences of the "dysfunctional family" and "delinquent behavior" for the individual. According to this logic, the delinquent juvenile subject had to accept controls not only for the good of society, but for their own individual welfare. These factors historically shaped the ideological-political framework of interventions for juvenile delinquency, with legal interventions being predominant, ie. interventions within the legal framework.

5. The Dominant Scientific Discourses Governing the Construction of Adolescence

5.1 The Psychological Discourse

One could summarize the dominant perspective of Developmental Psychology on adolescence through the frameworks proposed by the theorists themselves. Thus, adolescence, for traditional-dominant Psychology, can be understood through a bio-social approach and a dialogue between "continuity and discontinuity," in which the influences of biology, society, and culture play different roles each time. From the perspective of Psychoanalysis and the "turn to Discourse," Erica Burman (2008) attempted to deconstruct the traditional principles and establishment of developmental psychology through an effort to "reveal the ethical-political issues shaping research in Developmental Psychology." Her aim was to deconstruct Developmental Psychology by recognizing and evaluating the Discourses that historically and theoretically constructed the dominant concepts and formations of this field. Starting from the exploration of discourses about childhood, she demonstrates that childhood is a culturally constructed category that was conceptualized in contrast to adults and specifically to concepts of "mother," "father," "family," and "state" (Burman, 2008:7/81-82). The latter, which is directly related to juvenile delinquency, manages to regulate citizens due to the development of the scientific concept of childhood and its connotations (Burman, 2008:73). Thus, childhood and its related Discourses, such as the Discourse on Adolescence, reconstructed those categories from which they were constructed. Therefore, at the roots of Developmental Psychology, Burman primarily establishes a political organization, as a material consequence and a consequence in Discourse. This consequence concerns the construction of child and adolescent subjectivity as developmental stages that are tgiven, ahistorical, ethnocentric, and culturally one-sided. Thus, a specific Body of Knowledge for these stages is established, which includes the concept of knowledge itself as negotiable by subjects, and their relationship to it. Children and adolescents are considered as possessing, or partially possessing, knowledge and as in need of protection and education (Burman, 2008: 82-85). This protection was primarily assigned to the family, which left the field open for Developmental Psychology to conceptualize it, resulting in the concealment of broader historical-social explanations and politics that shaped it - which, for Burman, are connected with capitalism (Burman, 2008: 85, 126). Thus, the

Psychological Discourse on Adolescence constitutes an ideological-political treaty that played a pivotal, but not unique, role in the psychological interpretation of juvenile delinquency.

5.2 The Psychiatric Discourse

The intriguing issue regarding the Psychiatric Discourse is that it constitutes a selective articulation of Psychological, Medical, and Sociological Discourses. The classic Greek textbooks of Child Psychiatry that I examined refer to adolescence as well as juvenile delinquency, essentially representing rehashed theories of psychodynamics, primarily psychology, psychoanalysis, and empirical pedagogy. However, through their texts, the concept of adolescence is defined in evolutionary terms that can lead to psychopathology. Adolescence, therefore, in psychiatric discourse, sometimes constitutes an evolutionary process in the form of discrete developmental stages. Characteristic is this definition of adolescence (Tsiantis, 1997: 44): "We call adolescence the developmental process in human life that begins 'biologically' with the changes in the physiology of puberty and ends 'psychologically' with the final organization of sexuality." This view is supported by Freud's definition of adolescence as a transitional period between the childish organization of the self and mature, adult personality (Freud, 1905). Within this framework, it is conceived as a period of "disturbed mental balance" and fluidity (Manolopoulos, 1987: 43). This view in the context of Child Psychiatry is enriched by the Discourse of the New Psychoanalytic School and Anna Freud's views on the mass defence mechanisms of adolescents, which lead to two dominant "images" (Manolopoulos, 1987: 46): the image of the "ascetic adolescent" and that of the "uncompromising adolescent." The latter is defined as one who "refuses any compromise between impulses and reality" and, as shown in research, usually constitutes the subject of delinquency. Adolescence in this explanatory framework is also related to immaturity, but also "the basis for engaging in homosexual relationships" (Tsiantis, 1997: 22), while its development is based both on the traditional function of the family in terms of physiology and pathology and on a superficial political level: "findings indicate that normal adolescents adopt their parents' basic values (...) The completion of adolescence is a political issue" (Anastasopoulos, 1997: 27/41).

6. Scientific-Institutional Discourse, Explanation and Governance of Juvenile Delinquency

This section outlines the historical-genealogical course and naturalization of the dominant scientific-theoretical discourses that constructed the concept of juvenile delinquency. Historical studies on juvenile delinquency and related research demonstrate that the Legal Discourse is dominant, while Discourses of Sociology, Psychology, Psychiatry, and Education serve as satellites. These

discourses constitute the fields of "official knowledge" (Apple, 2008), within which the scientific-institutional version of the subjectivity of juvenile delinquency is constructed. The critical presentation is often accompanied by excerpts for the reader's scrutiny from the official discourse, i.e. for interpretation. An effort has been made for a representative presentation of the "counter-discourse" (Gegendiskurs).

6.1 Legal Approach (Legal-Criminological Discourse)

The views and articulations that structure the Legal/Criminological Discourse regarding juvenile delinquency are naturally not devoid of epistemologies and their corresponding ideologies. According to Georgoulas (2000), the two prevailing and most significant epistemological trends in Criminology are "Positivist Criminology" and "Criminology of Social Reaction." Positivist Criminology, also known as the "Theory of Pre-Criminal States," is in discursive articulation with Psychoanalysis and Positive Clinical Psychology, which are based on causal-deterministic explanations; it shaped the theoretical approaches to the concepts of "dangerousness," "ethical risk," and "pre-criminal states." An attempt was made to theoretically link both individual and social approaches with the aim of predicting the likelihood of individuals/youths/minors committing criminal offences. Thus, "pre-criminal dangerousness" was defined as: "the psychosocial phenomenon characterized by certain indications, from which it is reasonably inferred that the individual is likely to commit a crime" (Georgoulas, 2000: 142). This concept, as a Discourse, is positively defined in two phases: the static phase of medical-psychological and social elements and the dynamic phase of conflicts between the psychoanalytic "Ego and Superego" and the role of unconscious tendencies. Thus, the interest of this Criminology extends from actions to the personalities of those minors who, although they have not committed a delinquent act, are in an "at-risk" situation for it. The analysis of personalities is conducted through typologies (structured tables of criminal prognosis), which essentially lay the groundwork for the construction of the "pre-delinquent" and "potential delinquent" minor (Georgoulas, 2000: 143).

In Positivist Criminology regarding juvenile delinquency, there are also more "societal" perspectives that, based on social processes, show how "personality types" are confirmed. Most of these theories (such as Matz's theory) simply recognize greater freedom in social subjects without negating the deterministic perspective that emerges from "measurement." According to Georgoulas (2000: 131), the "Criminology of Social Reaction" had its precursor in Marxist theory, although it does not depart from the theoretical framework of "transition to action." This epistemological trend in Criminology is derived from Engels' theory of crime, according to which individuals are always forced to commit crimes due to the social and economic conditions in which they live. Thus, for the Criminology of Social Reaction, criminal/deviant behavior constitutes a social reaction to oppression and social injustice; its primary cause is "social warfare" (Georgoulas, 2000: 131), while the criminal/deviant

individual is conceived as a product of the capitalist economic system. In the development of the Criminology of Social Reaction, post-Marxist analyses were also utilized, focusing on how emphasis on individualization and the pathologization of juvenile delinquency contributed to concealing society's failure (Georgoulas, 2000: 132).

At this point, one might argue for a double construction linking Criminological Discourse with Psychiatric (perhaps also Psychological) Discourse. This concerns the well-known—within Social Psychology—identification of madness with criminality. As Foucault (1976, 1977, 1999, 2016d) highlighted, historically, madness became endowed with a dynamic for committing criminal acts. Conversely, criminal acts were pathologized either individually or collectively. Thus, this is perhaps another example of the interplay between the construction of the offender (and the juvenile offender) within the intersection of the Legal-Criminological Discourse and the psychiatric-psychological Discourse. It is worth noting that the entire issue concerns not only the theoretical conflict within the epistemological trends of Criminology but also its scientific framing. Although Criminology is considered a distinct science with origins and influences from disciplines such as Anthropology, Psychology, Sociology, etc., its dominant framing and social representation for Greek data place it primarily within the legal Discourse. Its very existence as a scientific field was constructed in relation to Law; it also constructed its subject primarily based on the commission of the social contract determined by laws: "Criminality is a product of double construction: the construction of criminalization and the social construction of the conditions activating the law" (Georgoulas, 2000: 147).

The perception and construction of juvenile delinquency in the legal-criminological thought that embraces social reaction seem to share common elements with critical trends in psychology and pedagogy. Thus, juvenile delinquency is not perceived within an ontological framework, but within a dynamic framework explained in terms of conflict: "A large part of deviant behavior has a political character, or rather a character of conflicting values" (Georgoulas, 2000: 132). Within the framework of the Criminology of Social Reaction, therefore, Positivist Criminology is considered to select, through the mechanisms of criminal law, those subjects that will be stigmatized as offenders or as "potential offenders." However, according to the Theory of Social Reaction, not all laws result from conflicts at the level of power. Georgoulas mentions that criminal-deviant action may also result from "moral crusades," in deviant acts that do not have specific victims but constitute acts of "correction" within an unjust society, according to the logic of the subject or the group (2000: 149). Close to such a view is Turk's theory (mentioned in Georgoulas, 2000: 149), according to which juvenile delinquency can be explained as "intergenerational conflict." In this context, the behavior defined as juvenile delinquency does not constitute a separate characteristic of specific juvenile subjects, but of all subjects. Here, both psychological and sociological Discourses have had some influence. Furthermore, through research on self-reported criminality, together with officially recorded delinquency, the Criminology of Social Reaction sees

another dimension of constructing the deviant subject: the condition of involvement with agencies of official social control and Justice. Thus, a juvenile offender "is not" someone who committed an unlawful act that went unnoticed or unconfessed - in the sense that they have not been institutionally constructed within discourse.

The victimological approach to juvenile delinquency addresses two main dimensions: firstly, the notion of the "law-constructed victim" and secondly, the model of victimization-criminality. In the first dimension, it seeks to liberate the victim from the legal definition and the procedures of its criminal management. An example here is the common position that juvenile delinquents, drug users for instance, should be seen as "victims of their addiction," regardless of whether they themselves perceive victimhood. The second dimension concerns "victims who become offenders." Based on this, even before potential victimization occurs, the characteristics that predict victimization also predict criminality. The legal-criminological governance of juvenile delinquency, however, is not exhausted by the above. In summary, although this discourse has a critical-political counter-argument, it constitutes, at its core, a positivist model of explaining juvenile delinquency, which selectively uses the discourses of other sciences such as psychology, psychiatry, and pedagogy.

6.2 Sociological Discourse

The Marxist sociological discourse regarding the subject can perhaps be argued to originate with the work of Antony Platt (1969). Platt's theoretical foundations can be politically aligned with Marx and sociologically with Bourdieu. The latter attempted to explain the construction of juvenile delinquency through the description of the construction of what he considers the opposing social group of the social elite (Montlibert, cited in Panagiotopoulos, 1998). He created the concept of "establishment" to explain how naturalizing, stigmatizing, and classifying social processes shape both the elite and the delinquents. According to this theory, juvenile delinquents constitute subjects and objects of a "negative establishment" (Montlibert, cited in Panagiotopoulos, 1998: 9). They originate from socially and politically dominant groups and, having been established as such, fulfil the role prescribed for them by institutions:

In short, they are usually perfectly adapted to the demands of the institutions that receive them, giving the impression, to echo a concept of Merton, that they had already developed a kind of premature socialization in the realm of criminal repression. They will always be pushed to cross the border that separates the normal from the pathological and will be referred to the side of the 'hampered' and 'base substances' of the chaotic, the impure, the polluted, in a word, the barbaric (...) their coercion into experiencing common experiences, their submission to the same 'pedagogy of emptiness' by the institution that has chosen them, reinforces and multiplies investments in forms of faith and practices that are deemed condemnable. The process of negative establishment not only does not re-educate and reform, but with its rituals, its inscriptions, the organization of its time, it

stigmatizes those established in the certainty of unworthiness and barbarity, which accompanies their assignment to discredited social positions (Montlibert, cited in Panagiotopoulos, 1998: 9-10).

Thus, for Montlibert, juvenile delinquents are: "the product of social arbitrariness and not the result of any natural necessity" (Montlibert, cited in Panagiotopoulos, 1998: 10). Nikos Panagiotopoulos (1998, 2013) considers that the Sociology of (juvenile) delinquency is connected with the Sociology of Education and jointly analyzes the materially existing social structures that produce the stigma for juvenile delinquency. This perspective is placed in opposition to the dominant perspective that prioritizes the "applied" criminological-legal and psychiatric approach to juvenile delinquency. In the introduction to his research on juvenile correctional institutions, Panagiotopoulos references the research-methodological approach to the socially constructed subjectivity of the juvenile offender, with theoretical foundations in Marxism and the mode of symbolic production of negative establishment as an instrument of dominance (1998: 36). In this way, the sociology of juvenile delinquency should be "accompanied by an analysis of the formation of the field of agencies managing delinquency, deviation, and anti-crime policy" (Panagiotopoulos, 1998: 30, note 1), ie. by using Foucauldian theory as well as social constructionist perspectives.

Given that our perception of the criminal justice system for addressing delinquency is based on a general problematization, which consists, on the one hand, of demonstrating that the realistic representation of delinquency as a clearly defined field (i.e., questions of how many delinquents actually exist, from which classes they come, etc.) should be abandoned and, on the other hand, defining that these specific individuals are placed in a social space, that they are not everywhere, meaning they are not interchangeable, and therefore the objective probabilities of the appearance of delinquent activities are structurally determined - thus abandoning bureaucratic subjectivism from the moment that, in relation to the position occupied by the agents in this complex space, their logic of practice can be understood and it can also be determined the way in which they will be judged, evaluated, and possibly perceived as criminals and as stigmatized individuals.

The sociology of delinquency becomes part of the sociology of knowledge and also of the sociology of philosophers, social justice, and "criminologies" (Panagiotopoulos, 1998:38). So, it's understood that stigmatization is socially produced from the moment it introduces an objective definition of stigma, understood as having real substance at the level of the institution/state that circulates it.

Considering the analysis above, the psychological rationale for juvenile delinquency appears to be constructed along two dimensions, a direct and an indirect one. The direct dimension involves an explanatory principle within the framework of Social Psychology, which, by utilizing sociological theories as well as the theory of motives, attempts to interpret juvenile delinquency in terms of intergroup conflict. Conversely, the indirect approach utilizes the rationale of Developmental Psychology and prevailing approaches to adolescence, perceiving

juvenile delinquency based on concepts of moral development, aggressiveness, and antisocial behavior. However, beyond attempts to explain and define juvenile delinquency, Psychological Reasoning (in contrast to psychiatric and legal reasoning) is interested, within the framework of Social Psychology, in the repercussions of labelling subjects as "juvenile delinquents." Social psychological reasoning seeks to explain behavior along the axis of social attitudes towards it. Kaplan states, "Part of the explanation of social attitudes towards behaviors is their frequency. Therefore, explaining behavioral patterns indirectly contributes to explaining the nature of social attitudes towards behavior" (Kaplan, 1984: 15). Without delving into the critique raised by the above, it opens the door to a theoretical and research-based differentiation between labelled behavior and labelling processes (Kaplan, 1984: 16).

Social attitudes towards juvenile delinquency and juvenile delinquents themselves are thus related to cultural norms regarding ethics and they influence the formation and function of punishment. Kaplan's explanation demonstrates how socio-cultural and social concepts of ethics are involved with the criminal justice system: "Beliefs about the morality or immorality of specific actions may be influenced by the severity of the reactions an individual receives for those actions. Reactions symbolize the wrongfulness and immorality" (Kaplan, 1984: 137). A dominant trend in Social Psychology wants juvenile delinquency to function as reinforcement to social norms, but also, drawing from Sociological Reasoning, perceives delinquent behavior as a condition for challenging given social values and moving towards social change (Kaplan, 1984: 138). This social change, however, is not perceived through critical psychological terms involving the political, but through processes resembling intergroup contact theory: "Gradually, the increasing frequency and visibility of socially prohibited patterns of behavior mitigate the severity of negative social attitudes, sanctions. Thus, initially prohibited delinquent acts become acceptable, and initial violations of a rule indirectly lead to social change and acceptance of the pattern" (Kaplan, 1984: 139). For Social Psychology, juvenile delinquency thus constitutes a complex phenomenon, the interpretation of which must be sought in the network of relationships between individuals, groups, and institutions. It is also acknowledged that the very definition has social consequences and is influenced by the coexistence of culturally heterogeneous groups, rapid and uneven social change, and differentiated political influence (Kaplan, 1984: 144). The influence of sociological reasoning is evident here.

Within the attempt to formulate a "General Theory of Juvenile Delinquency," emphasis was placed on the function that delinquent acts have for the subject itself - the juvenile delinquent. It is mentioned that the delinquent juvenile who engages in such acts achieves legitimate goals through illegitimate means. Here, the reasoning is social with elements of psychoanalysis. It relies on the classic frustration-aggression hypothesis, noting that the lack of agreement between self-demands, demands by the Other, and the available material resources to meet those demands lead to delinquency. Additionally, the delinquent subject may use delinquency to avoid or attack the social norm that

rejects it, or even to replace it with new delinquent norms, in order to self-evaluate more positively (Kaplan, 1984: 145).

This explanation, although more socially and less developmentally formulated, still implies a non-historical, apolitical subject. According to Burman (2008: 296), the 21st century marked a controversial view of childhood aggression (and delinquency). The logic of frustration-aggression, as well as that of the intergroup conflict associated with it, become objects of the "contemporary self-help industry" (Burman, 2008: 274) and the contemporary imperatives of the mental health promotion system, which serves capitalism "in producing moral subjects for the maintenance of bourgeois democracy" (Burman, 2008: 285).

In conclusion, it seems that Psychological Reasoning often reproduced both sociological reasoning and aspects of traditional developmental psychology. Simultaneously, the traditional aspect influenced the Legal approach as well as the Psychiatric and Pedagogical approaches.

6.3 Pedagogical/ Educational Discourse

One trend in Pedagogical Reasoning defines juvenile delinquency as a special educational category, perceived as a continuum where, on one end, are simple issues of school disobedience (mainly of children diagnosed or suspected with learning difficulties), while on the other end are serious criminal offenses, which often may indicate psychopathology (Chartier, 2013). Pedagogical Reasoning also adopts explanations from Legal, Psychological, and Psychiatric reasoning. In its extreme confluence, it creates classification principles, such as the "Educational Classification System" for the "educational detection of juvenile delinquency" (Kourkoutas & Thanos, 2013: 197). The most radical view of this trend concerns the so-called "holistic" social approach (Kourkoutas & Thanos, 2013: 201/211), which integrates the school environment into the creation and management of antisocial/delinquent behaviors. Simultaneously, the school setting is considered "ideal" (Kourkoutas & Thanos, 2013: 211) for psychopedagogical inclusion and prevention.

A second, less widespread, trend of conceptualization and treatment of juvenile delinquency can be argued to involve the pedagogical approach from the perspective of Critical and Radical Pedagogy. In contrast to the first trend, Critical Pedagogy Reasoning, with main representatives such as Giroux (2010a,b,c), McLaren (2010), Freire (1977), Aronowitz (2010), Freinet, and influenced by the Neo-Marxism of the Frankfurt School, the work of Foucault (McLaren, 2010: 312), as well as sociological theories (especially those of Bourdieu), perceives every pedagogical-educational issue through a socio-structuralist perspective (McLaren, 2010: 295).

The educational discourse is conceptualized not merely as a venue for social and class reproduction or for solidifying hegemonic discourse, but as a form of "cultural politics" (Gounaris & Grollios, 2010: 27). Specifically, the framing of Special Education and the linguistic deficits of cultural Others as well as concepts of school violence and bullying are considered to be embedded

within the hegemonic Pedagogical Discourse, which bears clear ideological content: "In education, neoliberal-conservative forces exploit panic about illiteracy, declining standards, and school violence to shift the conflict to a favourable terrain of tradition, standardization, and productivity, thereby connecting with significant segments of the working and lower middle classes under conditions of wage decline, unemployment, and insecurity" (Gounaris & Grollios, 2010: 34). In this context, the Pedagogical Discourse has been "psychologized, technologized, and postmodernized" (Gounaris & Grollios, 2010: 40).

The Radical-Critical Pedagogical Theory of Resistance (Giroux, 2010a:113) views what other theories term "antisocial/deviant behavior" as "oppositional" behavior (which nevertheless constitutes active-conscious resistance) by the educated subjects who resist dominant regulation and construction:

The concept of resistance (...) rejects traditional explanations of school failure and oppositional behavior and shifts the analysis of the latter from the theoretical domains of functioning and prevailing educational psychology to those of political science and sociology. Resistance, in this case, redefines the causes and significance of oppositional behavior by arguing that it has little to do with deviant behavior and learned incompetence, but has much to do with moral and political outrage (Giroux, 2010a: 114).

This excerpt may be commented on as an inclination of Critical Pedagogy to move away from articulation with Educational Psychology towards a politicization of education. This view aligns with Parker's perspective on the necessity of an anti-psychological approach against the "distinctive development" favored by dominant psychology (Parker, 2018: 74). This stakes out a pedagogical domain that is approached differently in relation to deviance between Pedagogical and Psychological discourse, progressive education based on the principle of Child-Centeredness. Child-Centeredness was philosophically grounded in humanistic Existentialism, psychologically in Rogers' person-centered theory, and pedagogically in the principles of Progressive and Anti-authoritarian education, primarily through the New Education Movement. Both critical educators (Apple, Freire, Giroux) and radical critical educators (Aronowitz, Freinet, Hooks, McLaren) critically engage with the Progressive Pedagogy of Child-Centeredness, which - unlike Traditional pedagogy - directs its focus towards the child and their way of learning. From the perspective of Psychological discourse, Erica Burman offers a similar critique. However, the dimension of these two approaches between Pedagogy and Psychology is crucial and has consequences for the discursive and practical governance of the concept of juvenile delinquency. According to Burman (2008: 262ff.), the development of Progressive Pedagogy and Education was based on the imperatives of Traditional Developmental Psychology, which was interested in the technologies and practices of education that concerned the "turn towards the child" and their interests. Thus, she argues that Child-Centered Education (and correspondingly the Pedagogy that underpins it) is characterized by categories that are social

constructions. Some of the most significant ones concern the concepts of "school readiness," "student choice," "student need," "play," and "need for discovery." Specifically, the conception of "basic needs" of students, which, if unfulfilled, lead to individual and social problems such as delinquency, constitutes a dangerous construction (Burman, 2008: 263).

Similarly, the emphasis on "practice" and "doing" promoted by the Pedagogy of "learning by doing" constructed the role of the educator as being only responsible for building the appropriate learning environment and pedagogical processes. Burman extends her thought by explaining how this child-centeredness leads to multiple problems for both students and educators. The latter, attempting to reconcile the conflict between the pedagogical "command of non-guidance" (which aims at developing independence) and the institutional imperative of responsible organization of teaching content and methods, leads to ambiguity and guilt (Burman, 2008: 264). She considers - and this is directly related to the logic governing psychosocial and educational interventions in juvenile delinquents through agencies - that when there is no regulation and critique of children's actions, this is equivalent to authoritarian suppression and construction of individualistic subjectivities (Burman, 2008: 266).

As discussed, the Pedagogical Discourse becomes deeply hegemonic and leads individuals to uncritically accept the regulation imposed on them (Burman, 2008: 269). Critique is exercised by Critical Psychology also in compensatory education, which is related to special educational needs and cultural specificities in education. The logic is that the discourse on "equal educational opportunities" conceals the school's role in perpetuating middle-class norms and the inequality of the "starting point" of student life. Furthermore, the assumption that "something is wrong" in children's environment (in combination with the often pathologizing discourses of Special Education) creates the educational paradox where school success seems to result from "appropriate" Pedagogy, while school failure is socially attributed to the family sphere, which, in turn, provides grounds for intervening in and stigmatizing family life through Education (Burman, 2008: 269-271). In this way, both Pedagogical and Psychological Discourses contribute to social control. Thus, for Burman, although child-centered education is presented as a counterbalance to social inequality, and despite the fact that it extends to political and emancipatory programs, it still operates in a naturalizing way, promoting an individualistic model of understanding childhood and adolescence that confirms the characteristics of those already socially advantaged, while pathologizing those who are socially disadvantaged (Burman, 2008: 261). This critical psychological perspective concludes that Child-Centered Education is equally oppressive as traditional education and should be rejected (Burman, 2008: 269). It is precisely in this trend of wholesale rejection that the differentiation of Critical Pedagogy lies.

The Radical Critical Pedagogical Discourse agrees with the critique of Critical Psychology with an acknowledgment that is also related to juvenile delinquency: "Conservative educators analyzed oppositional behavior primarily through psychological categories that served to define this behavior not only as

deviant, but, most importantly, as disruptive and inferior, a failure of the individuals and social groups that exhibited it" (Giroux, 2010a: 101). Similarly, it is stated that the partial failure of Critical Pedagogy, which sometimes led to the rejection of Child-Centeredness, resulted in the reinstatement of traditional conservative views that ignore the dialectical understanding of the active intervention of subjects/students as well as the aspects of the hidden curriculum.

In relation to the Pedagogical Discourse concerning "juvenile delinquency" or "behavior of resistance" for radical Critical Pedagogy, it appears to consider that the outright rejection of Pedocentrism/Childcentrism (as possibly performed by Burman) leads back to the logic of "adequate capabilities" that promote an instrumental approach to the literacy of the poor - inferred based on sociological discourse: and juvenile delinquents (Macedo, 2010:446). However, for radical critical educators, this does not mean that Child-Centered Education and the Pedagogical Discourse that supports it are not affected by the problems raised earlier. Rather, Pedagogy is expanded to "accommodate" issues related to its role (and the role of education) in multiple cultural spaces (such as, for example, educational programs - primarily for incarcerated/juvenile delinquents), which "have become vital for the production of models of human nature through the pedagogical power of a 'capitalist imaginary'" (Giroux, 2010b: 589). In this context, the Critical-Radical Pedagogical Discourse acknowledges the contribution of Foucauldian theory to the understanding of the knowledge-power relationship, which plays a role in comprehending the socially constructed school/educational truth (McLaren, 2010: 312-315). Thus, "disobedient," "violent," "antisocial," "deviant," or "delinquent" behavior must be pedagogically seen as a response to the question: "What spectrum of identities is available in an educational system designed to produce, regulate, and distribute characters, to govern gestures, to dictate values, and to police desires? To what extent does strict adherence to the rules of the school mean that students will have to forfeit the dignity and status they have gained through psychosocial adaptations to street life?" (McLaren, 2010: 326).

Pedocentrism-/Childcentrism then does not inherently act as a hindrance. However, a pedagogical discourse that promotes reflexivity in constructing subjectivity and the active right to "choose not to know" (McLaren, 2010: 327) may lead to criticism, political emancipation, and the production, by the educated subjects themselves, of "their own class position through education" (Willis in: Aronowitz, 2010: 729), ultimately resulting in pedagogical-critical reflection on how "the absences that are considered 'knowledge' have transformed experience" for each individual (Aronowitz, 2010: 731).

It can be argued that critical pedagogical approaches indirectly "predicted" the articulation of Pedagogical Discourse with Psychology, Psychiatry, and Law regarding "juvenile delinquency" and the way it is pathologized (through Special Education) and psychologized in contemporary approaches. According to Paulo Freire (1977), not only the "disobedient," but every educated subject is oppressed: "The establishment treats them as individual cases, as marginal people deviating from the general profile of a 'good,' 'organized,' and 'just' society. The oppressed are considered pathological cases of a healthy society, which therefore

must adapt these 'incapable and lazy' individuals to its own standards, changing its mindset (...) The solution lies not in their 'incorporation' into the structure of oppression but in changing the structure (i.e., educational/social) so that they can become 'beings for themselves'" (Freire, 1977: 81). This "authentic transformation of the dehumanizing structure" (Freire in: Lechouritis, 2017) is linked to Celestine Freinet's approach, which complements the critical pedagogical perspective.

Educational and research work exclusively for juvenile delinquents has been produced based on Freinet's theory. Freinet's critical-pedagogical approach (known as "Institutional Pedagogy") was based on Marxist and communist internationalist origins and shares similarities with the approach applied by Makarenko in the Soviet Union for juvenile delinquents (Baltas, 2017: 79). It expresses a complementary relationship between Childcentrism and a Sociocentric pedagogical approach (Karakatsani, 2017: 29; Spyropoulos, 2017: 41). This relationship is based on a dialogic approach in which internal educational institutions become the means for conflict resolution and structural change (Karakatsani, 2017: 13-14). Fundamental pedagogical concepts include those of work and discipline (similar to those of Makarenko) but seen within a framework of pedagogical self-governance with principles of libertarian education (Karakatsani-Markantes, 2017: 19). This Institutional Pedagogy constitutes a Critical Pedagogy of Resistance, in which students are perceived as citizens, and educators as critical-social reformers within a political-social and emancipatory framework (Spyropoulos, 2017; Baltas, 2017).

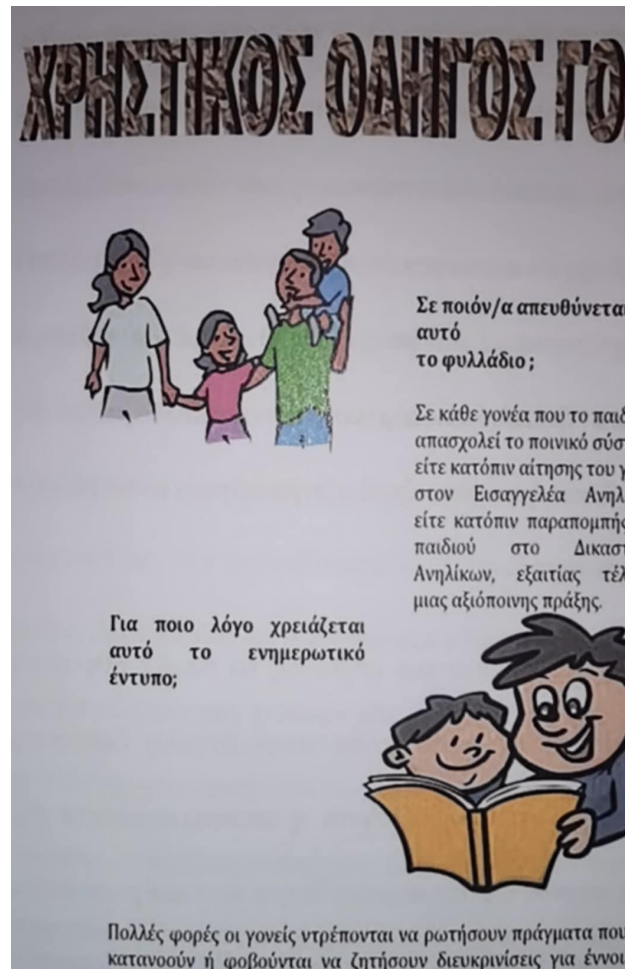
7. Partial Analysis of Excerpts from the "Parents Guide for juvenile delinquents"

Contextualization of the text: The first five pages were selected to frame the text. This indicates their significance in determining the overall content and understanding it by the reader.

Continuity in analysis: The consecutive nature of the first five pages allows for coherence in analysis. This facilitates understanding the connections and ideas presented in the text.

Overall, the choice of these initial pages as excerpts aims at facilitating comprehension and analysis of the text.

Excerpt 1:



The text is titled "Parenting Guide," with the adjective literally indicating, even dimensionally, that it is a text that "can," "should," "is good," "is advisable" to be used by parents. The general repetition regarding the determination and the verb omitted constructs an indirect normative and simultaneous authority relationship between the impersonal author and the subjects it addresses. In the upper left side just below the title, there is an illustration representing a classic nuclear family with a dark skin colour. This last element might reflect an attempt by the authors to bring the text "closer" to the subjects it addresses. Such a position surfaces specific sociological assumptions that echo the results of dominant research approaches that want juvenile delinquents to be characterized by specific ethnic and racial characteristics. Right next to the image, the text begins, structured as responses.

The dimension of syntactic and dialogic interactivity is evident at this point. The questions are in bold font. In the first question, the object of the verb is placed in two genders ("who") and in singular number, addressing each parent of the gender dimension separately. Subsequently, the subjectivity of juvenile delinquency is constructed indirectly: on the one hand, as subjectivity

subordinated to parents, based on legal discourse, and on the other hand, as subjectivity that "concerns the criminal justice system." The choice of the verb and its historical connotations, as well as the normative use of it, refer to subjectivities - social "problems." The clarifications that follow concern cases when a juvenile is referred to the Prosecutor or the Juvenile Court, and they are neutrally worded.

The next question concerns the purpose of creating the document. There may be a general repetition of silence in the text regarding the subjects, as there is an absence of a pronoun that would personalize the necessity of the document (e.g., "why it is needed for parents/for you/etc."). However, the proposition of the document in the previous question, as well as what follows the second question, indicates that the real subject of "needs" is the parents. Right next to the question, there is another clipart-style image representing an adult man and a child reading a book and smiling. The book is associated with the question, presenting its joint reading by parents and juveniles as an ideal condition. The first period, using the case-by-case formulation "many times," engages in a series of constructions and psychologizations of parental subjectivity. However, it is - with the first question - specified in parental subjectivity of children - delinquents, implicitly defining the type of family and parents of juvenile delinquents. The construction is carried out on two axes of dominant psychological classification: cognitive and emotional.

Thus, parents cognitively "do not understand" and perceive the concepts and processes as "confusing," while emotionally they "feel embarrassed" or "afraid." The construction of the incomprehensibility of concepts and processes by parents implies subjectivities with inadequate education and converses with the data of dominant dimensions in the analysis of juvenile delinquency. The "intrafamily situations" are constructed as an incomprehensible field for them. The next question concerns the purpose of creating the document.

The first period, using a casuistic formulation "many times," engages in a series of constructions and psychologizations of parental subjectivity, which, however, with the first question, is specified in the parental subjectivity of children - delinquents, indirectly defining the type of family and parents of juvenile delinquents. The construction takes place on two axes of dominant psychological classification: the cognitive and the emotional. Parents must accept "encoding," "advice," and "handling," while the "guide" is impersonally positioned as the agent, rather than the subjects and the scientific specialties behind it. The ultimate aim of this clearly formulated regulation of subjects is stated as the prevention of "pointless conflicts," with this formulation serving a series of constructions: Firstly, the use of the noun refers to a psychological term.

The relationships between parents and children referred to in the criminal justice system are constructed as generally conflictual, with the former being portrayed as ignorant, implying an inability to handle situations. Furthermore, the choice of the adjective constructs the dimension of conflicts through the difference between "pointless" and "purposeful" conflicts. The concept of conflict, within specific family contexts, is judged as inherently "pointless," a product of parental incompetence. Indirectly, the subjective shortcomings of

juveniles reflect the dysfunction of an incapable parental framework. This view aligns with the majority of scientific discourses on juvenile delinquency (Perpiraki, 2019).

The paragraph then transitions, coinciding with the change in verb person from the third person to the second singular and first plural. The acknowledgment of conflicts is perceived as a "point," where there is direct address and invocation of a knowledge held by the parent subject. The "as you know" is typographically emphasized, functioning as an institutional and binding reminder/invocation of an unspecified knowledge, coming simultaneously into contradiction with the attributed "ignorance" earlier in the text. Syntactically, the choice and use of this verbal phrase are abstract. Its clear syntactic object is the subsequent "we should emphasize." Thus, the emphasis on the invocation of the subject's knowledge pertains to its acceptance, by the collective but abstract "we" ("we should emphasize"), behind which is implied a network of "experts" in intra-family relationships and psychology regarding delinquent behavior.

Excerpt 2:

συμπεριφοράς από το παιδί φέρνει αλλαγές στη ζωή ό
παιδιού αλλά και όλης της οικογένειας. Κάποιες πράξεις
από το σπίτι, ακατάλληλες συνναστροφές, διακοπή φοίτ
σχολείο, υποψία χρήσης ουσιών) μπορεί να είναι
τραυματικές τόσο για το παιδί όσο και για τους γονείς.
περιπτώσεις το παιδί μπορεί να νιώσει ποικίλα, ίσως και
συναισθήματα, μεταβαίνοντας από διαφορετικές συννα
φάσεις: να θυμώσει, να σοκαριστεί, να φοβηθεί, να νιώσ
νιώσει αδυναμία ή συναισθήματα έντονης κυριαρχίας...

Αυτό όμως που πρέπει να γνωρίζεις ως γονέας είναι ό
περίπτωση δεν εγκαταλείπουμε και δεν αδιαφορού
περίπτωση του παιδιού μας. Απεναντίας, του δίνουμε ν
με τα λόγια μας και με τη στάση μας ότι είμαστε
σύμμαχοι στην πορεία της ζωής
Επιπλέον, αν: α) είσαι θυμωμένος/η, β) δυσκολεύε
φορές να ανταποκριθείς στις πολλές υποχρεώσεις
ενδιαφέρεσαι να ακολουθήσεις μια σαφή μέθοδο
συγκρούσεων ή δ) επιθυμείς να διαχειριστείς κα
συναισθηματική σου διαθεσιμότητα, **προτείνουμε** να α
τις ακόλουθες οδηγίες.



Ενδυνάμωση γονεϊκού ρόλου

Οι ενότητες που ακολουθούν διαμορφώθηκαν από την
προέκυψε για την καθοδήγηση των γονέων στο πλαίσιο ε

This passage continues from the previous excerpt with the sentence "...we should emphasize that the manifestation of any kind of antisocial or delinquent behavior..." Thus, reference is made to delinquent behavior, which, through coupling, is identified with antisocial behavior, echoing a dominant dimension of psychological, psychiatric, and pedagogical discourse. The parenthetical "examples" function as definitions of antisocial and delinquent behavior. Delinquency as behavior consists of "running away from home," "inappropriate socializing," "school dropout," and "suspected substance use." None of these acts is conceived as delinquency, but rather falls into dimensions of pre-delinquency (Perpiraki, 2019). Moreover, an identification with the dominant Sociological and Pedagogical Discourse is identified, which correlates juvenile delinquency with social interactions and school dropout.

This equation of the two behaviors and the reference to specific actions emphasize the "consequences of delinquency" for the juvenile subjects and their families. At this point, compared to consequences described in dominant research, a discrepancy can be observed in the consequences for the juvenile as described in the pamphlet (Perpiraki, 2019). In contrast to a majority of research discourses that emphasize social dimensions as consequences of delinquency, with social stigma being predominant, here a concept of individual psychology with psychoanalytic origins is prioritized: trauma. The juvenile, constructed as a delinquent, is conceptualized as a "traumatized" subject, which is primarily an emotional entity dominated by anger, shock, fear, guilt, weakness, or dominance. These concepts are described as "phases" through which the "traumatized" subject "passes." However, the traumatic is syntactically the act itself; the influence of the Sociological Discourse of Victimization is strongly evident.

The next paragraph begins with a contrast ("however") regarding the emotional reactions of adolescents with regulatory vocabulary ("must") and addressing the second person singular ("you should know"), while simultaneously invoking identity ("as a parent"). However, following are directives that have a regulatory and binding character, implying in parallel a general repetitiveness that what is proposed constitutes characteristics or behaviors attributed to parents and thus passed on to adolescents through a victimological approach. Consequently, delinquent adolescents are implied to be children of parents who abandoned them, neglected them, and did not stand as their "selfless allies" throughout their entire "life journey." Additionally, with the additive "Furthermore," the discourse becomes telegraphic with alphabetical enumeration, which although expressed through hypothetical propositions, constitutes a psychologization of parental subjectivity related to juvenile delinquency, while also constituting the familial framework within which delinquency is constructed.

The victimological approach intertwines here with the incrimination of the family. Thus, through the use of affirmative propositions, definitive inclinations indicating the real, and the use of the second-person singular verb for each parent separately the passage is permeated by a sense of anger and inability to respond to obligations. Through the difference in the adjective "clear," this parent is considered by definition to be permeated by and using vague, unstructured, and

thus ineffective conflict resolution methods. The orientation towards conflict itself shifts the socio-psychological stakes of juvenile delinquency into conflict with the parents. The last sentence invokes an "emotional availability" on the part of the parent, which, however, is not properly manageable in their relationship with their child. Consequently, the adolescent subjects are constructed through differentiation and the general repetitiveness of discourse that structures parental subjectivity as passive, traumatized, helpless subjects subjected to mismanagement of conflicts they have with their parents. Subsequently, the text employs intense writing to emphasize the non-coercive nature of the instructions/advice that follows.

The phrasing is again in the first-person plural, suggesting one or more authorities. Below the verb, there is an image - a sketch from the field of education, the function of which in relation to the text is not clear. Just below, between the image and the sections/instructions, a comment from the authors is interjected, appearing parenthetically in smaller font size than the rest of the text. The title concerns a concept from Psychological Discourse, that of "empowerment of the parental role." The note constructs its existence as a response to the "need for parental guidance." Thus, it seems that the behavioral guidelines that follow are those that will strengthen the quality and role of the parent, who is thus directly constructed in linguistic differentiation as "weakened" and inadequate, since their child has "issues" and has "engaged" the system. The sections on role empowerment involve emotional regulation (anger management), the biopolitics of daily life (schedule management), and techniques for managing relationships (negotiation).

The next excerpt pertains to emotional management concerning the juvenile subjects.

Excerpt 3:



1. Ακούμε τον άλλον (όχι ισχυρογνωμοσύνη), συζητώντας χωρίς προσκολλήσεις (κολλημένα).
2. Σκεφτόμαστε ποια είναι η αιτία του θυμού.
3. Εκθέτουμε επιχειρήματα προσπαθώντας να βρούμε λύσεις από κοινού.
4. Δεν κρίνουμε το παιδί μας χωρίς να το ακούσουμε.
5. Λαμβάνουμε σοβαρά υπόψη τις ψυχολογικές και σωματικές επιπτώσεις του θυμού.
6. Κατανοούμε και ενίοτε συγχωρούμε.
7. Δεν προβάλουμε τις δικές μας επιθυμίες στα παιδιά μας, απαιτώντας να τις ακολουθήσουν.
8. Κάνουμε το βράδυ απολογισμό της ημέρας.
9. Χαλαρώνουμε το σώμα. Κάνουμε βαθιές εισπνοές - εκπνοές (5 με 10 προσπάθειες).

Β. ΔΙΑΧΕΙΡΙΣΗ ΠΡΟΓΡΑΜΜΑΤΟΣ (βασικές ανάγκες ατομικής και κοινωνικής λειτουργικότητας, δηλαδή ανταπόκριση σε υποχρεώσεις)



1. Οργανώνουμε την ημέρα με κριτήριο τις υποχρεώσεις/ευθύνες.
2. Λειτουργούμε ως πρότυπα στο πλαίσιο τήρησης του προγράμματος που ακολουθεί το παιδί μας.

The first section, as indicated by the bold capital letters, deals with "Anger Management," followed by a definition of anger that likely derives from a lexicographic source and emphasizes the causes of anger, including both behaviors ("prohibition, insult, denial") and emotions ("disappointment"). The formulation of the title serves as both a distinction and a general repetition. The meaning remains open, hovering between the subject of anger, for which it is not clarified whether it is the parent's or the child's. Inserted between the definition and the text is a clipart-style drawing representing a well-known cartoon character ("Taz"), who is not just depicted as angry, but is the quintessential perpetually angry cartoon. His appearance differs and deviates from the human condition of previous drawings: his form resembles a monster, something threatening and frightening, thus indicating in a dialogical dimension with the text that anger "turns the other into a monster." The following text consists of a numbered list of instructions and recommendations. The tone appears ostensibly advisory, using definitive declension in the first-person plural, but its function is regulatory, intensified by the use of the verb in each "advice." Thus, the following identical constructions are performed based on enumeration:

1. Parents usually do not listen to the minor and are filled with arrogance and dialogical "attachments." Here, a more formal term is chosen, while within parentheses, a more colloquial, everyday term is used, reflecting the writer's perception of linguistic and cultural choices as well as the educational level of the parents. Also, the dialogical condition among family members is characterized as having these "attachments," which refer to incorrect representations of parents.

2. Parents are thus inherently placed in a guilt-inducing conceptualization, while minors as subjects are not "heard."

3. It is implied that parents do not consider the cause of anger, while the subject of anger remains ambiguous and can refer differentially to both parents and the minor.

4. The absence of a definite article and possessive pronoun as companions of the noun "arguments" implies a condition-hypothesis that the described situation does not occur. That parents either do not have or do not present arguments and do not attempt to find solutions together.

5. This suggestion for "finding solutions together" does not so much constitute a way or directive to strengthen the parental role as it does a theoretical assumption. There is a contradiction here, as words that are considered clarifying in relation to the cultural level of the parents (e.g., "hang-ups," mentioned earlier) simultaneously imply that parental subjects are capable of understanding the way to jointly find solutions. The formulation also suggests that this is something they do not actively pursue and perhaps do not know how to accomplish. With this "advice," hearing as a conflict resolution process is reduced to a discursive grafting, as a prompt similar to the first one is reiterated, but this time emphasizing that parents often judge the minor without "listening" to them. The

use of the possessive pronoun "our" contributes to the approach of guilt-inducement.

5. This directive implicates the subjects in orienting themselves toward the negative impacts of anger, which are mentioned to affect both the physical and psychological levels, but are not specifically named anywhere in the entire guide. Once again, the subjects are considered incapable of conducting a discussion, presumed to be ignorant of the parental role, while simultaneously being aware of the physical and psychological effects of the emotion of anger and even capable of recalling and "taking them into account" in practice.

6. The subject/parent is called upon here to "understand" and "forgive." The verbs are presented without definite articles or determiners, thus referring the significance of their utterance to a general principle. There is no specific object to clarify "what" exactly needs to be understood and forgiven. Thus, the verbs function as a "difference," potentially implying as objects: behavior, personality, the minor, the situation, the action, anything that can be perceived as belonging to the subject. The adverb "sometimes" specifies the temporal as well as the qualitative load of the verb "forgive." Here, the very concept of the verb, originating from the Christian-religious lexicon, is cryptic and may be connected both to the discourse of Child-Centered Psychology and to the dominant Psychiatric and Educational Discourse. Thus, diverging from the imperatives of "Child-Centered Psychology" (Burman, 2008), minors may not always deserve forgiveness from their parents, a fact that contradicts the imperative of "unconditional" acceptance. Furthermore, the content of "forgiveness" is not defined, nor is it clear whether it pertains to behavioral reaction or internal processing. It remains ambiguous.

7. As in the fourth directive/prompt, here, too, the formulation is made with a negative proposition ("Not") and with the use of a verb with clear references to psychological, but mainly psychiatric discourse, which has appropriated the psychoanalytic lexicon (Perpiraki, 2019). The parent is perceived as an incomplete subject who "projects" desires and "demands" from their children. Implicitly, the Victimological approach also dominates here, with minors being subjects who receive unreasonable demands - products of unresolved psychoanalytic issues/conflicts.

8-9. These prompts engage with the cognitive-behavioral therapeutic discourse of mainstream psychology by calling upon parents to perform the cognitive process of "apology," which once again implies a subject-knower of the process. Moreover, the suggested relaxation techniques are given in the form of medical advice with a specified number of attempts. Overall, beyond the constructions mentioned regarding the subjectivity of both parents and minors, the very construction of the dominant framing, namely anger, converses with subjectivities. Thus, the proposals yield a definition of adolescent anger that appears to emerge purely through negotiation with parents, is ahistorical, a-social in a broader context, and certainly apolitical.

Excerpt 4:

Απόσπασμα 10:

3. Φροντίζουμε ώστε τα μαθήματα να προηγούνται της διασκέδασης.
4. Καθοδηγούμε, ανεξαρτήτως πόσο κουρασμένοι είμαστε.
5. Φροντίζουμε ώστε ο χρόνος διασκέδασης να είναι όσο πιο οριοθετημένος.
6. Μαθαίνουμε στο παιδί να επιλέγει την ενδυμασία και περισσότερο με βάση τις ανάγκες και λιγότερο με τις επιθυμίες του.
7. Ανταμείβουμε το παιδί, όταν τηρεί τους κανόνες, συμφωνούνται από κοινού έπειτα από διάλογο.
8. Επιμένουμε στην τήρηση των κανόνων χωρίς να επηρεάζουμε από τη συναισθηματική πίεση που ενδεχομένως μας νιώθουμε το παιδί μας.
9. Ας μην παραμελούμε να παρατηρούμε τη συνέπεια των πράξεών μας όσον αφορά στη φροντίδα του εαυτού του (την υγιεινή).

Γ. ΔΙΑΠΡΑΓΜΑΤΕΥΣΗ (μέθοδος επίλυσης διαφορών)



1. Συζητάμε με μοναδικό κριτήριο τι είναι ωφέλιμο για το παιδί.
2. Δεν επιβάλλουμε εγωιστικά την άποψή μας.
3. Δεν επιβάλλουμε την άποψή μας με την απειλή ή τον φόβο.

This excerpt concerns the 'management of the program,' which is once again presented in a solely nominal phrase and abstractly, so as to apply to both parents and adolescents. Within parentheses, another definition seems to be offered, without the positive equality symbol ($=$) of the previous excerpt, so as to be perceived as clarification. Thus, the program is identified with 'individual and social functioning needs,' for which there is an explanation that they involve 'compliance with obligations.' The explanation may imply difficulty in understanding the term functionality, while at the same time, the latter is defined as compliance with obligations. Thus, the parent, but primarily the adolescent, is not considered functional if they cannot meet externally imposed obligations.

The instructions are presented numerically here as well. However, semantically, the sentences do not appear as "disjointed" as in the previous excerpt, but could form a structured text. Initially, parents are called upon to organize the day based on the semantic pair "obligations-responsibilities." This directive seems to contradict Directive No. 7 of the previous excerpt. Furthermore, adolescents are constructed as individualities that are not entitled to control and initiative in organizing their "day." However, if the proposition is perceived, within the framework of conflict, as referring to parents, once again their inability in this area is implied, while simultaneously the way in which they could be successful is not clarified. The second sentence calls upon parents to serve as role models within the "framework of following the child's schedule." The concept of the schedule seems to become even more confused at this point. It is neither syntactically nor semantically clear whether this statement negates the previous one or constitutes an indirect reference to one of the legal interventions, the externally imposed program within the framework of anti-crime policy. The instructions continue in the next excerpt. The presentation of the instructions continues to rely on the use of active voice verbs, with the next directive indirectly segmenting the adolescent's day into the dichotomy of obligation ("lessons") - entertainment ("fun"). In this way, and in accordance with the dominant Educational Discourse, learning is defined as an obligation, and indeed an obligation that must be enforced by parents.

Adolescent subjectivity is defined here as legitimately governed biopolitically in the dimension of the classification of time and activities. It is forbidden to self-regulate obligations and entertainment, while the two concepts must be clearly separated, a practice that aligns with dominant aspects of Special Education (Perpiraki, 2019) and institutional environments. Next, parents are recommended to "unremittingly guide." The verb cultivates an undisputed yet abstract meaning, as it is not accompanied by specifications, and the syntax between the two clauses is incorrect. The second clause of this directive implies a parent of a delinquent adolescent, who must be a tireless subject of guidance, with exaggeration evident here. Simultaneously, the delinquent adolescent is constructed as a subject requiring continuous and uninterrupted guidance, with a clear dialogical relationship with the notion of surveillance.

The fifth directive is permeated by internal contradiction between the concepts of "entertainment - limitation". The second term engages in dialogical (Bakhtinian) and discursive dialogue with Psychological Discourse. The entertainment of adolescent (pre)delinquents is governed by limitation, therefore it is accepted that it must be restricted in terms of time, duration, and type. The dialogue here with surveillance and institutionalization is also evident. Directive No. 6, besides not explaining how the parent can "teach" the child about types and manners of dressing and eating, comes into direct conflict with Directive No. 7 of the previous excerpt. Thus, the needs of a delinquent adolescent must be clearly distinguished from their desires, classifying the latter into the realm of inappropriate. The desires of adolescents are generally deemed inappropriate and not considered to meet their basic needs.

The next directive reveals that the above should be understood not just as indirect governance, but as clear "rules" established on the basis of common consent. The verb "reward" is preferred with clear connotations of behavioral approach, while "together" is partially countered by the subsequent recommendation regarding "persistence" in the rule.

In this recommendation, there is a contradiction with Directive No. 6 from the previous excerpt. Thus, underage subjects are sometimes perceived as subjects that need to be understood on an emotional level, and sometimes as subjects that exert "emotional pressure." The 9th prompt regarding the program essentially expands on what was mentioned in Recommendation No. 6, so the reference here serves as a dialogic graft that emphatically operates in terms of the concept of surveillance, highlighting the dimension of personal hygiene.

The third section, as depicted in this excerpt, concerns the concept of negotiation, which is clarified with a parenthetical noun phrase as "conflict resolution." The term interacts with Psychological Discourse. Here, there is also a clipart-style sketch portraying two "age-old enemies" of the comic world, the cat and the mouse, who are depicted embracing and smiling in a posture indicating that negotiation was successful even for them. The instructions in this section clearly relate to the use of language and dialogic conditions. In the first two instructions, parents are called upon to understand which contents and modes of discussion are beneficial for their children and adopt them without imposing their opinion. The adverb "selfishly" attributes characterization and psychologizes, while the entire sentence constitutes a logical contradiction with everything mentioned above (and especially in the previous) excerpts. The third directive essentially constitutes a prescriptive aphoristic phrase with elements of populist language usage, but also ambiguity.

The recommendations of the 4th directive regarding the avoidance of "emotionally charged words," in conjunction with the linguistic examples provided in parentheses, potentially contradict the imposition of boundaries proposed earlier; additionally, they attempt to strip parents of elements of emotional expression, while simultaneously implying juvenile subjectivities that must be approached with emotionally neutral, detached, regulatory methods in order to regulate and prevent them from becoming "issues." The function of the fifth directive serves as a graft, reintroducing the term negotiation. It could constitute part of the introductory clarification. Here, the ideological function of the first-person plural is very intense, placing parents in a condition of accepting "defeat" at the negotiation level, a fact that also contradicts many of the above "advice." The final prompt of this section contains elements of optimistic economic discourse, positioning negotiation within the dilemma "risk-benefit," so that the relationship with the minor is elevated to the dimension of general repeatability as a risk-reward relationship, measurable magnitudes based on behavioral standards to which the minor must adhere.

8. Discussion

As seen from the analyses, the Parent Guide recommends the political and socio-psychological dominant discourse that wants the parents of juvenile delinquents to be "dysfunctional subjectivities" of a family framework that "requires regulation and therapy." At the same time, the "delinquent" behavior is identified with the "antisocial" one, which stems from "inappropriate" parental subjectivities. Dominant aspects and perceptions from the fields of Law, Psychology, Psychiatry, Pedagogy, and Sociology are selectively used to construct the subjectivity of the "juvenile delinquent," who is considered to require surveillance and "therapy" from the framework of "specialists" (psychologists, educators, psychiatrists, representatives of the criminal justice system). The ethical and political dimensions governing this concept lead to technologies of control and family incrimination/culpabilization.

The analyses indicate that the guidelines for parents constitute the advisory role of "experts," which attempts to regulate the program, reactions, discourse, behavior, and daily life of the involved subjects in order to "correct" parental "mistakes" and to make the juveniles politically and socially desirable subjects. One of the pivotal issues emerging from the analyses of the text and the illustrations of the guide concerns the integration of governance of subjectivities within a positivist and neoliberal discourse that seeks measurable and acceptable social behavior, emphasizing compliance in regulation, constituting the social and economic "gain" of the subjects.

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Production of life in times of death: Five schizoanalytic movements¹

Domenico Uhng Hur

Abstract

We are living in a period marked by death, hostility to differences and explicit authoritarianism which were largely spread by the federal government of Brazil itself (2019-2022). The politics and practices of death are exercised, total and generalized necropolitics, propagated not only by sovereign power, but produced, predominantly, by the axiomatics of capital. In this way, this article aims to reflect on clues for the production of life in current times of propagation of death, based on the theoretical referential of schizoanalysis. The method used was the selection of some concepts from Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari's philosophy of difference to operate this reflection about the contemporary. We seek to discuss possible movements to open pathways that escape from the politics of death. As a result, we discuss five schizoanalytic movements for the production of life: the transmutation of forces; adoption of territory as a starting point; potency of the *occursus*; appreciation of the infinitely small; and foster affection, becomings, as passage.

Keywords

schizoanalysis, schizodrama, Gilles Deleuze, Félix Guattari, psychology, politics

The coronavirus pandemic, the extermination of the black population, the peripheral population, the indigenous peoples, the prejudice against immigrants, and the practices of the Brazilian government (2019-2022), are all the expressions of the current spirit of the times, the *zeitgeist*. The politics and practices of death are exercised, total and generalized necropolitics, propagated not only by sovereign power (Mbembe, 2018), but produced, predominantly, by the axiomatics of capital (Deleuze; Guattari, 1972²). Families who suddenly lose a loved one, indigenous people who are expelled from the flat space of their territories centuries ago, the young black boy who walks cautiously down his street on his way home from work, fearing a stray bullet. We are all living with

¹ Published for the first time in Portuguese in Hur (2021c).

² In the works of Deleuze and Guattari we use the original publication date of the first edition, or when the lectures were delivered. Thus, the publication year of the translated versions only appears in the bibliographic references.

death lurking, in which the social body itself mortifies society. Thanatopolitics. We live in a wasteland, not deterritorialized. We are dispossessed, we have been subtracted and they subtract our territory, our lives, constantly and strongly. And we lament and resent it.

In this way, this article aims to reflect on clues for the production of life in current times of propagation of death, both individually and collectively, based on the theoretical referential of schizoanalysis. It seeks to trace lines so that we can escape from the reactive forces, from resentment (Deleuze, 1962), to the production of new possibilities. In short, to reflect on how to foment revolutionary becoming, and not to focus only on the future of the revolution (Deleuze, 2003).

The method used was the selection of some concepts from Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari's philosophy of difference to operate this reflection about the contemporary. We seek to discuss possible movements to open pathways that escape from the politics of death. The author of this article is a specialist and scholar of all the published work of Deleuze and Guattari and constantly publishes theoretical reviews on the pair's work, as well as articles, chapters, and books in Psychology, inspired and referenced by schizoanalysis. It is noteworthy that only a few concepts were selected in this article, and that obviously there are other deleuzoguattarian concepts that can contribute to this reflection on the production of life in times of death, and that have not been cited here.

We carry out our reflection in an unusual way. In the first topic, instead of personally "distancing" ourselves from the investigated theme, we implicate ourselves to the maximum, insofar as we start from our own singular, individual experience, and articulate it with the *zeitgeist* of death. We read the present from a vibrating gaze (Rolnik, 1997), a haptic dimension (Deleuze, 1981a), in which the gaze of the researcher is affected by the forces that surround him, in a modality of a 'tactile gaze' (Hur, 2020a; 2021a). Evidently, in the first topic, in constructing a narrative from a 'me', one seeks to articulate to a 'we', in an affective resonance between singular and collective experience. Next, we develop the clues in five movements that can contribute to the production of possibilities, of lines of flight that escape this diagram of death. Our main reference was the philosophy of Deleuze and Guattari, as well as the Schizodrama, invented by Gregorio Barenblitt (1998), besides brief quotations from Brazilian indigenous theorists.

A *zeitgeist* of death

My personal experience³ accompanies the same *zeitgeist* of death updated in the social field, but for other reasons. I do not suffer the ethno-racial and economic-social mishaps, even though I occupy the paradoxical place of possessing a 'yellow flesh', nor have I been hit by viral infection. But due to a chromosomal translocation, a molecular transmutation, there was a genetic alteration and my

³ Because this topic deals with a personal, singular experience, the narrative is written in the first person singular.

partner's bone marrow started producing blastic cells that "attack" the organism itself, causing the decline of platelets, leukocytes, and red blood cells. Acute lymphoblastic leukemia, Philadelphia positive. An auto-implosive reaction in which the organism mortifies its own body, and which is not located only in one organ, tissue, or stratum, but circulates throughout the whole body, navigating through its blood streams. It is not possible to tackle them in a specific territoriality, enclosing the pathogenic cells within the 'walls of an establishment', as the disciplinary logic of biopower operates (Foucault, 1975), because the cancer cells are propagated in the open field of the whole body. It is not possible to extirpate a part of the tissue, or to isolate it. It is in the hematopoietic system itself that the deadly cells are produced. One can draw the parallel between what occurs in this body with fascism, for it is the cellular agents themselves, endowed with reactive and destructive forces, that cause the social body to become mortified (Deleuze, 1986a).

The discovery of leukemia left us banished. We have been swept away by the flood of death. The chances of survival are 30-40% in the next five years. We were hit by the fall from the sky that Davi Kopenawa (2015) tells us about. We glimpse the end of the world, the end of our worlds, as Ailton Krenak (2019) and countless other indigenous sages warn us. Death and the razed earth were presented to us in an a-parallel fashion. Different origins of the causes of death, different forces, but the same affection (Deleuze, 1981b), updated in the personal and collective spheres, takes place. The result is an affection of sadness, of impotence, which subtracts the potency of the individual and social body (Deleuze, 1981c), and can lead to a situation of fatalism.

And the treatment of leukemia manages to be even more deadly than the disease itself. The chemotherapy is so strong that it burns all the tissues. To eliminate the cancer cells, it also extinguishes the 'healthy' blood cells: red blood cells, white blood cells, platelets, neutrophils; everything is destroyed. The 'security mechanisms', 'biopolitics' (Foucault, 1976), of combating the infectious agent use the scorched earth tactic. As warfare occurs in every open field of bodily space to eliminate the blasts, what remains of the 'healthy' body must also undergo this purification and abolition. An immune paradigm (Deleuze, 1986a) ensues, in which there is almost total destruction to ensure the life of the body, leaving it open to bacterial and viral infection.

However, even with the scorched earth strategy, there is no cure by medication, by any chemotherapy. Being Philadelphia positive, the 'cure' is achieved only by transduction of the hematopoietic system from an external being: bone marrow transplantation. That is, there must be the migration of a creation system of new cells, molecules, other peoples, that inhabit this body, the newly razed land, the desert, producing a new world, another desiring system and circuit. A new occupation by populations of creating cells, that germinate another body and a new living.

But what lives to produce? In our case, we will not be able to follow mainstream models of lifestyles, either in their disciplinary or capitalist mould. We will not update the traditional and 'normative' model of an arborescent family with children, due to the sterility caused by chemotherapy, nor the

neoliberal modulation of performing ever more intense physical and sporting feats. Even if we wanted to, due to the reduction of the body's motor power, it would not be possible to follow the neoliberal imperative, of the axiomatics of capital and body-capital (Hur, 2015; 2018), to always accelerate the productivity of any object, in which the body-machine must hypertrophy and produce as much as possible.

Finally, with death and the fall looming, what to do? Deny reality and curse? Accept fatality and cry? Hate and deplore the other and the difference? We are banished, with the shadow of death, and no presupposed models to follow. There are no transcendent ideals to anchor, no hope of state power to take, but the forest of immanence to navigate. As Krenak (2019) teaches us, to slow the fall, we must open parachutes, as colourful as possible, to produce deviations and other possibilities. There is no teleology, or ready-made recipe, but that in this fall we can create new trajectories, differential relations, deviations: *clinamen* (Deleuze, 1969; Baremblytt, 2019). Possibly Krenak's thought is closer to schizoanalysis than we imagined, even if both had a very distant conceptual-geographical genesis. And as Casé Angatu also inspires us, we have taken five centuries of beatings, but we keep fighting, laughing, 'whipping the enemy'. Active forces must break out of all the reactivity and nihilism we live in, no matter how much we die. We will all die. But here it is not an action towards death, of having a finite and limited time, such as a Heideggerian perspective. Rather, it is an action for life, for the production of other lives, intensive and infinite, even with the boundaries of their limitations.

We must create our own lines, believe in our own potency, and insist and re-exist in life (Fumiató; Santa Cruz, 2005). Even with the wasteland, we have a body, which we should map as much as possible, feel it, experience it, even if in many cases we are still unaware of its potency (Deleuze, 1981c).

Five movements for the production of pathways in times of death

To create lines of flight from the politics and practices of death, we seek to adopt some clues for the opening of new pathways. From the fountain of concepts, conceptions, and devices that schizoanalysis provides us, we derived five movements. Five clues, which, in this case, are not disposable, but indispensable for the production of new configurations of forces and another way of living in times marked by death. As mentioned above, countless other concepts, other processes, could be worked on. However, through our historico-geographically situated cartography (Deleuze; Guattari, 1980a; Rolnik, 1989), mediated by our haptic gaze (Deleuze, 1981a), we follow these five tributaries, as means to think about the creation of other modalities of life, subjectivations, and not reproduce the political hegemonic forces that disseminate resentment and generalized nihilism. They are: the transmutation of forces; adopting one's own territory as a starting point; working on the potency of the *occursus*; valuing the infinitely small; and fostering affection, the becomings, as a passage. These clues are not presented from an evolutionist point of view, in which one step would lead to

another. There is no order to follow, you can work on any of them, start with any movement, go through them at the same time, without a determinant order.

These five movements are inspired and based on Deleuze and Guattari's philosophy, in which we seek the power of their conceptions to deal with the challenges we face nowadays. It is a text-rizhome that tries to migrate its philosophical potency as a combat weapon to pursue and produce a life unmarred by resentment and reactive forces. These movements can be adopted in schizoanalytic and schizodramatic clinics⁴, in institutional interventions, by activists in social movements, as well as by people and collectives interested in the cultivation of another living, alternative to the *zeitgeist* of death.

First movement - Transmutation of forces

We live in a period marked by death, hostility against differences, explicit authoritarianism, and great diffusion of a type of discourse-practice denominated as Bolsonarism. And this configuration of forces is even incorporated in the State, updating to the maximum what Foucault (1976) calls the racist State. In all these contexts hatred, deploration of the other, and a lack of care for life are preached. As Deleuze (1962) would state, these processes are the symptoms of a certain mode of forces, the expression and actualization of nihilism, the crystallization and triumph of reactive forces and the will to nothingness.

Thus, there must be a new movement that does not reproduce this reactivity, however arduous and difficult it may be. How can one not be saddened and not react reactively to the state of affairs in which we live? How can we not hate those who hate us? If we breathe death, how can we breathe life? So, a fundamental movement must be the effectuation of a torsion, a bending, of forces (Deleuze, 1986b).

Regardless of which device (Deleuze, 1989; Hur, 2012) is adopted, we seek the realization of this bending, a folding of force, which results in the transmutation of reactive forces into active ones (Deleuze, 1962). In this twisting of forces, the experienced nihilism is encouraged to give way to the desirous production of life. The negativity of egoism and antipathy give way to the associativity of sympathy (Deleuze, 1953) and altruism, resulting in a rotation in which resentment and hatred are expelled by the device of eternal return (Deleuze, 1962), in a centrifugal movement that ejects the reactive and death forces, so that only the forces of life, which insist and build, return.

In the field of the schizodramatic clinic, we find that this transmutation of forces also produces a transition of affective modes, as Spinoza theorizes (Deleuze, 1981c). There is an affective fold that can lead to the transition from sadness to joy. This is why Baremlitt (1998) supports new devices, whether in the clinical field, in art, or in social movements, for the production of this other

⁴ Gregorio Baremlitt (1998) spells *klinica* with 'k' and not with 'c' to differentiate his practice from a traditional clinic. In the clinic, etymologically, there is the movement of the health agent leaning over the patient. In the klinic, inspired by the idea of clinamen, he seeks to produce deviations, differences and events from this encounter.

quality of forces and desire. And thus create new assemblages, apparatuses, machines. Escape lines and desiring war machines (Deleuze; Guattari, 1980c) in their different contexts of action for the actualization of a becoming-revolutionary and, who knows, even in the construction of a future of the revolution.

Second movement - Adoption of territory as a starting point

Schizoanalysis extols the production of rhizomes and the constitution of singular existential territories (Deleuze; Guattari, 1980a; Guattari, 1989a). However, the intellectual of the human sciences in Brazil is closer to the Sorbonne than to Capão Redondo (SP), Rocinha (RJ), or Setor Garavelo (GO). He dreams more of Paris and London than of the Amazon. Even though he knows his material and social situations, such contents do not usually appear in his reflections and publications. It is no wonder that Foucault called the Philosophy Department of the former Faculty of Philosophy, Sciences and Letters of the University of São Paulo (FFCL-USP) a French overseas department (Rodrigues, 2016), or Lévi-Strauss was surprised by the library of Brazilian intellectuals, which resembled the libraries of their French peers.

However, it is not enough for us to import philosophical knowledge produced in Europe and ‘apply’ it here without a geographical-historical modulation. Too often the human sciences become Europeanized in Brazil and forget their own context, such as what happened with mainstream Lacanian psychoanalysis in this country. Schizoanalysis must germinate and spread in Brazilian territory with all its hybrid, mixed character, and fight the prevailing challenges, which is currently the fight against the reactive and death forces, amplified by a right-wing political extremism.

Let us take an example of a singular assemblage that constitutes a Latin American schizoanalysis: the schizodrama. We understand that schizoanalysis is first of all a Philosophy. But in Brazil and in South America there was a migration of this philosophical content to the clinical field, as well as to others, such as arts, politics, education, etc. One of the most unusual creations of this philosophical-clinical transduction is schizodrama, created by Gregorio Baremlitt in the 1970s (Hur, 2014; Baremlitt, 2021). It is also worth pointing out that schizodrama is not a mere application of schizoanalysis, for with the performatization of its concepts in countless devices there is a fruitful production of other concepts and conceptions (Baremlitt, 1998; 2019; Baremlitt; Amorim; Hur, 2020).

Schizodrama establishes a clash of materialities, a whirlwind that produces a fissure, a crack, that makes flows of possibilities happen. It brings new clinical frameworks; it doesn’t use only the traditional private office. It is not closed between four walls; it is not a clinic in the strict sense. It is operated with the schizo walk (Deleuze; Guattari, 1972), and can be performed in the open field, in squares, in mental health psychosocial care centers, in student occupations (Hur; Couto, 2019). If schizoanalysis has a European origin, schizodrama is Latin

American. If Deleuze and Guattari have Nietzsche, Bergson, Spinoza, Marx, etc. as references, Baremblyt's schizodrama also has the popular knowledge of indigenous peoples and social movements as inspiration, or at least tries to learn from them. For here we are not only occupied by the French of the Champs Élysées of May '68, but also by the *xapiris*, *orixás* and *encantados* of the Brazilian soil. If the schizoanalysis developed in Vincennes, or in the Parisian cafes and libraries, the schizodrama arose in the lofts, full of pillows (from Rua Herval⁵), in the performances in basements full of people in Belém do Pará (Lima, 2014), in the CAPS, as the "Maria Boneca" (Bichuetti, 1999, 2000), in the public squares and, who knows, in the future, in the peripheries, in the crossroads, *terreiros* and *giras*.

Schizodrama is a clinic of forces and, therefore, it should also grasp the forces of the struggles of Brazilian social movements, be it the *Movimento dos Trabalhadores Sem Terra* [Landless Workers' Movement] (MST), the indigenous movements, all the minorities that are exploited and not listened to, but that have a lot of power and content to say and to teach, inspire and empower us. Thus, we cannot forget the revolutionary potential of our Latin American territory. Contrary to what the Marxist 'bibles' and their 'prophets' advocate, the first proletarian revolution did not start in Europe, it was not the Communist Revolution, nor the Paris Commune. The first proletarian revolution that is even racial and anti-racist takes place in Latin America, more precisely in Haiti (1791-1804) and was made by black and enslaved people (Alliez; Lazzarato, 2021). Enslaved people who updated their active forces and stopped being 'slaves', becoming warriors, constituting an incredible revolutionary machine long before the bastions of communist parties, such as the Soviet or Chinese Red Army. The "black army is the first proletarian force to profoundly revolutionize the art of war" (Alliez; Lazzarato, 2021, p. 109). They produce a hybrid revolution, singular, in a mix between European militaristic models of army, combined with molecular guerrilla tactics and voodoo rituals. There is a beautiful syncretism between military organization and religious rituals of the territory: "Using torches to point the way, the leaders of the revolt gathered in an open space in the thick forest of Mourn-Rouge, a mountain towering over Cap François, the largest city. So Boukman, the chief, after performing voodoo spells and drinking the blood of a pig, gave the last instructions" (James quoted by Alliez; Lazzarato, 2021, p. 109).

For, as the Colombian guerrilla group M-19 claimed, this is not the Soviet Union, but Macondo. And if one day we are going to make the revolution, it will be dancing *cumbia*, with maracas. Or, here in Brazil, singing samba, headbanging to rock, or for the younger generations, dancing funk. Therefore, our references should not only be Lenin and Rosa Luxemburg, but Marighella and Marielle. We need to apprehend and update all the instituting power of Latin American syncretism in our devices, in this action of resistance and *quilombozation* of minorities. Schizodrama is the Latin American actualization of a decolonial schizoanalysis.

⁵ Street where the Gregorio Baremblyt Institute is located. It is in the attic where schizodrama training and clinics are held.

In this sense, we must produce knowledge, and life, in diverse spaces. Not only to sacralize the altar of the Church-University, but to transit through the city in its different zones of intensity. Not only reproduce research and studies for the elites, but also constitute, in alternative ways, a favela Psychology (Gonçalves, 2019). To agency such powerful theoretical and technical devices to our context and realities, in a nomadic experimentation in which we will reap their results and ramifications. And, obviously, not ignoring our own territoriality of origin, no matter how much they have been abandoned lands, but that we still carry within us, as well as the margins we traipse and the dissents we provoke.

Third movement - Potency of the occursus

A fundamental movement to overcome the current state of affairs is to believe in the potency of what Spinoza calls the *occursus*, that is, of the encounter (Deleuze, 1981b), be it in the clinic, in social movements, in life. Encounters always bring the variation of potency, the transition of affections. In the encounters we seek the relations of composition of forces that form and result from concrete assemblages and machines. For, how to create agency and compositions with others? How to capture the irruption and potentiation of forces in encounters?

Spinoza discusses what a body can do, the potency of a body, from its movements and compositions. He provides us with the fundamentals to apprehend the forces related to affections, as well as an entire analytic of the composition between bodies. To do so, he performs a first inversion, in which he aims to leave the primacy of consciousness to prioritize the relations of affections between bodies. In these compositions there are relations of affecting and being affected by the other body(ies), in which the different combinations can increase or decrease their degrees of potency. If there is a combination between the forces and affections of different bodies, a compositional process takes place that leads to a potentiation of both bodies, resulting in a *good encounter*. On the contrary, if the relation with a body poison mine, subtracting it from its own forces, there is a decomposition characteristic of a *bad encounter* (Deleuze, 1981c). Thus, in the regimes of composition, affections of production of life are associated, such as joy and fruition, while in the relations of decomposition, affections of subtraction of its potency, such as sadness and resentment.

In this way, the affections result from relational processes and encounters between bodies, but not only between humans, but also between human and inhuman. There is a composition of (de)potentialization between bodies of heterogeneous materialities that produce events and affective modes (Hur, 2016).

In the cartography of the body, of the connections, it is necessary to find strengths where we think there is only weakness. Compose and not decompose relations. To add and not subtract. To take the forces and produce life in its various faces. To jump the blockages of the 'white wall'. Escape the centripetal forces of the 'black hole'. To generate and sow new worlds. Because the

connections and the assemblages that we carry out with other bodies amplify our potency.

In the composition of the relations of forces, we form new desiring circuits, more powerful, capable of the most unusual realizations (Deleuze; Guattari, 1975; Hur, 2020b). Therefore, in this outcast world, in order to achieve the maintenance of life, we must increase the connection, encounters, and fusion with other bodies. In the example of leukemia treatment, one way to guarantee life is the trans-fusion of red blood cells and platelets. A connection is produced of blood flows with a population of anonymous, mixed flows, in a diagram distinct from the current ones. Instead of a disciplinary diagram (Foucault, 1975), of control (Deleuze, 1990), or of an extremist capitalism, which configures the Bolsonarist *necroliberalism* (Hur, 2021b), the production of life is supported by a kind of diagram of care and solidarity, or better, an ecosophy diagram (Guattari, 1989b, 2013). A cell migration occurs between bodies, in a therapy that is based on deterritorialization and circulation, in an authentic production of a Body without Organs (Deleuze; Guattari, 1980b), with all its cruelty and forcefulness. In hemotherapy, scraping and demolition are accomplished by chemotherapy, while the circulation of new flows is provided by trans-fusion and the future creative activity of the hematopoietic system in reconstitution. It is curious that we can say that hemotherapy is schizoanalysis in action, and we risk saying that, unlike psychiatry, it is the most schizoanalytic medical discipline⁶.

It aims to operate in *occursus* a trans-fusion, not only of blood, but of dreams, affections, intensities, projects, realizations, that take our bodies to previously unimagined dimensions. The isolated body tends to a reactivity, but the body in composition tends to unusual activities, to an assemblage of a desiring guerrilla machine that turns the possible into reality. The production of new desiring outflows that aspire not to the constitution of norms, the arborescent bourgeois nuclear family, the reproduction of the fallacious model of the entrepreneur updated by the axiomatics of capital (Deleuze; Guattari, 1972), or of all the ideals of transcendence. The potency of the *occursus* enables us to escape from these *fictions* to create *affections*, other symbolic productions and affects. Escape from the constituted plans, diagrams, and beliefs to live constituting affections. And what is a great challenge: the encounter must be able to produce potencies and not power. Potency generates horizontal bonds, solidarity, and collective participation, while power often generates subjugation, domination, and impotence. And what is power if not the domestication of forces (Massumi, 1992), or, according to Baremblytt, the rotten, dead potency?

⁶ Another important debate is to reflect on the different diagrams of forces updated by the medical institution and its agents. Evidently there is a very intense updating of a disciplinary diagram, sometimes even the sovereign, feudal, but also, in some agents, minorities, the diagram of ecosophy or a care, alluded to.

Fourth movement - Appreciation of the infinitely small

We should not only apprehend the macropolitical transformation, the final result of the action, but also value the infinitely small (Deleuze, 1968; 1981b). Abandon the movement of transcendence, the habit of pursuing unattainable ideals and utopias, such as macropolitical changes that go far beyond our potential for action. For example, if we had a federal government (2019-2022) that saddened us, upset us, and produced the spread of hate speeches and the amplification of death policies, we should not feel depressed if in our political action we failed to remove it and produce another government. Because the Brazilian State is a concrete machine that refers to a population of about 215 million people, in a macro-political dimension that far exceeds our scope of action⁷.

It is necessary to abandon the ideal of transcendence, the instituted images of thought, in order to travel in the logic of immanence, valuing the transformations of the infinitely small. The infinitely small is not that which has little value, but it is that which refers to differential relations and to the variation of degrees of potency (Deleuze, 1968; 1981b). We have to focus on the forces, the intensities, which are only apprehended in the relations and differences they produce. Investigate the vectors, the speeds and slownesses at play. There must be an attention to the molecularity in which connections and vibrations are produced, changing the apprehension from equality and stability to difference and continuous variation. And to see ourselves no longer as watertight points, but as becoming in movement. To recognize that we are degrees of power in continuous variation, that create differences at every moment. Each expression of active forces, of desirous fluxes, is already a victory, in a moment when governmentality preached the opposite: sadness, fear, and impotence.

So we should not blame ourselves if our political action, or action in the world, did not succeed in saving women from the Taliban coup d'état in Afghanistan. But rather value what we have altered in the sex-gender power relations in our immediate sphere, in our community. How we deconstruct and scrape away the everyday machismo we reproduce, whether in our small social circle as well as in ourselves. Scraping away the Taliban of the couple, of the circle of friends, maybe even of the neighborhood, as well as demolishing the internal Taliban. To deconstruct our own microfascisms, resulting in small transformations, in lines of flight, that conform clearings for a new softness, another world, without being fixed in the duty with the Revolution. Each day in itself is already a combat and an infinity, regardless of whether we die tomorrow or fifty years from now. We do not live because one day we will die, but for the experience and production of possibles, infinities, all moments. The multiplication of potency and infinitude, or as Baremlitt puts it, an inventive dramatic proliferation (Hur, 2022).

To do so, it is not enough to live in a social movement, or to call ourselves socialists, or schizoanalysts: we have to produce movements, or rather, passages,

⁷ Unless we are at the head of a large financial conglomerate, a significant sector of the armed forces, an important media group, or a religious Institution with millions of followers.

trails, clearings, that refer not only to the overcoming of a certain social problem faced, as well as a crossing of oneself. In tips of deterritorialization that sprout from the surface itself, even if small, but that are perceptible by the differential relations that they establish. Affirming ourselves as minorities, dissentors, expressing our intensive potencies.

Fifth movement - Affection as passage

In schizoanalysis there is a double temporality expressed by Chronos and Aion. Thus, in its clinic setting there is the actualization of a singular metric and temporality. Its score is not written in defined bars (simple, binary, tertiary, quaternary), nor determined by the chronological duration of fifty or thirty minutes of a standard psychological consultation. Its duration is not extensive, chronological, but intensive, *aionic*. This is why Chronos loses its determinacy, opening to the whirlwind, or even to the abyss of chaos. So there is the primacy of temporality that Bergson calls *duration* (Deleuze, 1966).

In ‘Bergsonism’ duration is seen as the temporality that produces a block of intensities and coexistence between distinct temporal planes (Deleuze, 1966). But it is also the phenomenon of connection between two states, two affections. It is the lived transition, at the same time cut and connection, that is, the pure affection: the passage from one affection to another (Deleuze, 1981b). In this sense, the movement of duration implies the affection itself, which produces the passage, a path to another state. It is the affections that pass, that produce bifurcations and lines. It is the affect that provokes the movement, the crossing, making the connection between two states of things (Deleuze, 1981b). In its actualization, which refers to the passage of forces, the flow of desire, it results in an intermediate instance, *between*.

In this way, affect as a passage does not imply only a temporal succession between states of the same body, nor is it internal to a being. Far from being restricted to an internality, or to the logic of the private, it is what is most shared in a relationship between-two, in a group, or in a wider collectivity. Its irruption is related to the actualization of becoming, a flow between, which provokes a gap in the being for other configurations, promoting a connection between different bodies.

Affection works as a ‘wave’ that tunes different bodies to the same frequency. It is the constitution of a block of intensities, which creates a regime of resonance in common and passage between the actants. It is in the link between internality and externality, individuality and collectivity.

This place it occupies, of tuning and resonance between different bodies, can generate the aforementioned processes of composition and decomposition of relations. Every passage, every movement, implies an elevation or “decrease of potency” (Deleuze, 1981b, p. 170). Affection thus occupies a fundamental role for the production and management of life, and one that the State and Capitalism Mafia (Hur, 2018) use explicitly to generate relations of domination and

subjugation; but in our case, we pursue as the passage to the production of life and autonomy.

The management of affect as passage can result in the production of distinct affections, as regimes of forces. So, in the clinical realm, an interpretation that tries to make the passage, but breaks down the person, will produce sadness. In the same way, an authoritarian experience in a social movement also carries this depotentialization and resulting affect of subtraction.

On the other hand, in times of extremism we are closed to affections as passage; they are experienced in the individual sphere, we close ourselves to differences. In order not to access difference, one can close oneself off, or even come to hate the other. To try to avoid contact with otherness, there is the production of “a quantity of immobilized power” (Deleuze, 1981b, p. 177). In an attempt to prevent that which could break it down, it ‘armors’ itself. However, this rigid defense hinders the passages, manufactures a cloister that closes itself to the forces outside and to molecularity itself, and, consequently, the body’s power diminishes. This enclosure generates hatred as a consequence, for “to hate is to want to destroy that which threatens to destroy us” (Deleuze, 1981b, p. 174). Hate becomes an expression of an attempt at conservation, resistance to change. Therefore, depotentialization, sadness, is at the basis of hatred. This is why there are also the joys of hatred, a deploration of the other, which act as a kind of compensatory joy, which follows the same reactive forces and an enclosure to changes and passages.

Therefore, the schizoanalytic clinic, the schizodrama, or the social movement, should not only deterritorialize, demolish, the processes. For the production of life, it is necessary to apprehend how this dimension *between* happens, what occupies it, what produces the crossings. It is necessary to produce passages that can be traversed and not throw people recklessly into the abyss; otherwise they close themselves off and armor themselves, because each one has a singular existential territory and creates unique paths. We must produce the affect as a passage, as a transition, to new affects, vibrations, to the variation of the intensive degree, understanding them as the result of the flow of desire, of forces. In short, to operate in this singular temporality that propagates itself in the passages of duration and its resulting regimes of forces, constituting new connections and compositions, for the production of new commonalities.

Final considerations

In this article we have developed five movements, selected from a review of the schizoanalytic literature, that can arm us in the struggle for the production of life in times of death. If today there is a diagram that updates death and resentment in different spaces, our concern is anchored in the active utopia of daring to produce life in such arduous times.

From long schizoanalytic work we pinpointed clues and not ideals, or teleologies. The clues-movements refer to practices that can be actualized both on an individual and collective level. For this reflection we also carry out a

dialog with schizodrama, a theoretical-klinical field created by Gregorio Barenblitt.

Our reflection, inspired by schizoanalysis, proposes that for the production of life we have to reach the molecularity of being in order to provoke a torsion of the forces, its folding. The purpose is to expel their reactivity and for the forces to return only imbued with their affirmative characteristics; to finally accomplish *a transmutation of forces*. To constitute a plan, to agency processes, not only with foreignisms and international elitism, but, above all, to recognize, merge, depart from, and *construct one's own territory*. We must act through differential relations, abandoning the logic of transcendence and travel on the plane of immanence, considering ourselves as degrees of potency in continuous variation, that is, map and value *the infinitely small*, propagate the revolutionary becomings and not only be anguished by the future of the Revolution. To apprehend and accompany the flow of desire, of forces. To elicit the becomings and thus understand *affection as passage*; as a transition between affections, or even as a connection, an intensive block between two or more bodies, that produces compositions and a new commonality.

That is why we understand that schizoanalysis and schizodrama can operate just like a social movement, in its action of deconstructing capitalist subjectivity towards other sensibilities. Scraping away individuality on the way to the common, the multitude. Expel from anger, resentment, provoking a twisting so that the affection of joy is produced and the potentialization in the constitution of a connection between differences: a heterogeneous community. Shared and adequate ideas for a new living, for another world. The desirous outflow produces affective states, and, on a more extensive level, corporeities, associations.

Updating these five movements takes us to the path of producing differentiation from the variation of the degrees of potency, from the incitement of affections as passages. Producing and experiencing intensities and new existential territories incites a social transformation that is not only macropolitical. The mutation of the embodiments, the desiring transformation, which is the passage of the becoming: the guerrilla warfare of the active forces. This is why, especially in times of death, one must live and desire. Fight and experience. We end with the commander of the M-19 guerrillas, Jaime Bateman (1983), possibly another schizoanalyst who has never read Deleuze, but who knows so much about the relation of affections, potency, and becoming, and who inspires us for the production of new knowledge, other clinics, and politics: "One must dance and sing. And not only to death, nor sing only to defeats. One must sing to life, because if someone lives for death, he is already dead. People who live only on memories are dead, memories without becoming only bring sadness, and sadness never, never generates struggle".

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Social Practices of Psychology

Opening Pandora's Box: The politics of the psychological clinic

Ilana Côrtes dos Santos & Domenico Uhng Hur

Abstract

This paper aims to discuss the policies within the psychological clinical device in Brazil. We performed a bibliographic cartography in the Brazilian academic literature regarding the key words "clinic" and "politics". The research resulted in the identification of psychopolitical characteristics of the clinic, which were categorized into four axes. In analogy to Pandora's box myth, these axes represent the evils released, as well as hope at the bottom: (a) colonizing practices, which move towards the maintenance of a hegemonic subjectivity colonized by European standards; (b) psychotechnocracy, practices that promote a universal truth about human beings and their behavior; (c) capitalization of care, a practice impregnated and guided by neoliberal logic; and (d) hope, proposition about a politicized and transformative clinical practice.

Keywords

clinic, politics, device, psychology

Introduction

What is produced through a traditional clinical practice, usually non-critical, that does not observe its origins and hegemonic tendencies? Being involved with the forces within our own professional performance requires a critical analysis concerning the discourses and practices that we may propagate. Psychology is not immune to or above these forces, it is not outside of power relations, or politics. In addition to being considered (or masquerading as) a practice of care and health, it can be a source of violence, exclusion and oppression. Since instituted as a field of knowledge, psychology is part of the massive network of social forces and configurations that entangle relations of power and domination. It is imperative that we, psychologists, are committed to analyze our theoretical and technical tools. It is a deception produced by liberal ideology to assume that our devices have a neutral positioning, apparently detached from political issues. Psychology acts intrinsically in the production of professed truths, traversed by several power relations, whose intention can be the maintenance of the *status*

quo, social control, silencing and obliterating the differences (Coimbra, 1995; Hur, 2013a). Therefore, we should be aware of the forces that intertwine our daily clinical practice and the resulting political positions.

The clinic itself originates from the medical practice, in which the practitioner observes and examines the patient to formulate the diagnosis and consequent possible treatment. Foucault (2014a) makes a critical analysis, pointing out the power relations present in this act, permeated by social, political and economic issues, in which the psychological knowledge exerts a direct power over bodies and population, in a government through biopower and biopolitics (Foucault, 2008).

In this framework, some produced norms transcend the individual. The norm and its deviation, namely disease, become entities themselves, characterized by a series of traits produced by these knowledge and techniques. Health, as a set of norms that are produced, is defined by the adequacy to what is instituted, that is, by the absence of deviations, "diseases" and "symptoms".

Psychology, in this scenario, is inserted in its articulation with medicine, as well as other normalizing knowledge. Psychological practice also presupposes, in principle, a range of normality as a reference. Deriving from the tests, evaluations and scales, the standard is established, and the deviations pursued. Between labs and analysis, the individual is leveled by one's average mediocrity. The focus is on the standard and on its deviation, the disease, to the detriment of the patient and his observations about oneself.

At the end of the nineteenth century, psychoanalysis seems to establish something new, inaugurating a clinic that focuses on the patient's discourse about one's own suffering, moving from the paradigm of observation of symptoms to listening. Through an individual, intimate and confidential clinic, the patient exposes the issues to an analytical intervention, which forms the classic image that represents psychology: a patient lying on the couch, the psychologist next to him/her listening with a notepad in the hand (Kahhale, Costa & Montreozol, 2020; Moreira, Romagnoli & Neves, 2007). However, it keeps reproducing the disciplinary, phallogentric and heteronormative logic (Hur, 2022).

In Brazil, Psychology, which was regulated by Law as a profession in 1962, maintains the same disciplinary logic. For example, one of its private attributions, standardized in Law 4119/1962, is to "solve adjustment problems", that is, to adapt people to norms (Hur, 2007). Following the intensification of neoliberalism, there was a significant increase in the number of courses and graduates in Psychology at the end of the 1990s, from which, in 2012, about 80% came from private institutions (Guzzo, 2018). Psychology formation focus mostly on the individual clinic in Brazil (Moreira, Romagnoli & Neves, 2007), despite the variety of professional activity possibilities. In spite of the increasing participation of psychologists in the public health system, companies, and several other sectors, their prevailing performance (Moreira, Romagnoli & Neves, 2007) still falls on the individual private clinic, corroborating the social imaginary that associates the image of the psychologist to the intimate clinical setting.

That said, this research seeks to analyze the private individual clinical device, understood here as "traditional clinic". Although nowadays the clinic can

assume several configurations, whether enlarged, group, or any other territory, we still find a large number of psychologists in the private individual clinic. According to the census carried out by Federal Council of Psychology (CFP) in 2022, the majority (73%) of these professionals is autonomous. What are the forces in this reserved space, and how to shed light on these problematizations and raise psychologists' personal implication? Is this practice necessarily individualizing and neutral? Does saying neutral necessarily mean producing a non-political practice? How do we observe the presence of politics in the clinic? From what practices does politics manifest itself?

As a knowledge that is supposedly neutral and detached from its social context, it's created the illusion that psychology and politics do not mix. This point of view reiterates a depoliticized practice, which deals with individuals alienated from their context, based on aprioristic universal maxims (Barros, 2005). It is appropriate, however, to problematize how much this supposed depoliticization is not a political positioning in itself. When considered neutral, psychology can support the silencing of suffering generated by social, race, gender and sexuality inequalities, emphasizing a decontextualized and individualized subject (Carneiro, 2020).

What do we call politics? We think politics not only from the state or partisan perspective. According to Hur and Lacerda (2017), politics happens in different spaces, in the exercise of the relations of forces that results in the management of life and in the processes of subjectivation. Thus, politics is exercised in all social spaces, whether in its macropolitical or micropolitical aspects (Guattari, 1981; Hur, 2009).

The psychological clinic, that is, the relationship that is established between the psychologist and the patient, is also a political relationship. By thoroughly analyzing it, we can observe the forces it comprises, the individuals positioning, the practices of power/knowledge, as well as the discourses reproduced and reassured, the investments of desire that are modulated and the produced subjectivity. Although the clinic is individual, it is still imbricated in the great social web that surrounds it, through which the person must be seen in one's plurality, as a historical, psychopolitical subject. This configuration of forces produces subjectivities, and affects the way we see and experience life. Forces that may evoke desiring production processes, which produce life and emancipation, or forces that activate limiting processes and block life (Hur & Lacerda, 2017).

This paper aims at discussing the politics within the psychological clinical device in Brazil. Thus, we conducted research to find out the discourses and practices that characterize the psychological clinic. How can the clinic conform or not to the broader political conjuncture? In this sense, we discuss the relation between the psychological clinic and politics, that is, the politics of the clinic.

To carry out this work, we used bibliographic cartography as method (Hur, 2016; Quadros, Moraes & Bonamigo, 2019). Cartography emerges as a possibility to follow the nomadic composition of heterogeneous elements. The researcher, being one of these elements, does not claim to be impartial (Passos & Eirado, 2009). The research, from this perspective, is not the representation,

interpretation, or discovery of fixed data about the object. It instead follows the processes that constitute the object and the subject, which "define each other, one in function of the other" (Barros & Barros, 2013, p. 374). Cartography is accomplished by deconstructing certainties and raising non-universal possibilities (Rolnik, 2006). The reality is denaturalized, which makes other perspectives possible concerning the same reality being experienced, while contemplating the coemergence of subject/world. By destabilizing what is already naturalized, enabling openings to be analyzed, we access and follow the composition of the reality in which we are also inserted as researchers (Passos & Eirado, 2009).

Cartography in bibliographic research, therefore, is not limited to data collection and subsequent interpretation. "Nothing to be interpreted, nothing to be represented. In cartography, writing is the intensity in transit. It is connected to the outside, it comes from the outside, it forms a rhizome" (Quadros, Moraes & Bonamigo, 2019, p. 88). It is intended to map not what arises as frequency, but irruption of intensities (Hur, 2021). It is, therefore, a process of experimentation and affectation by heterogeneous forces that transgresses individual and intentional limits, questioning norms and rules, problematizing and denaturalizing what is instituted. Junctions, disjunctions, connections and decompositions in the common plane of intensities that include the researcher and that connect as a rhizome in an infinite way, using criticism as an affirmation of difference.

This proposal of interventional and participatory bibliographic research makes speaking, seeing and writing, it makes evident investments of desire that are being operated, and copulates with the sociopolitical field through agency with other practices and knowledge in a movement of concatenation. If the bibliographic research produces records, these records will be consumed by other researches, which in turn will produce new effects, implying an ethical-political commitment that is at the same time an ethical-political-aesthetic investment. (Quadros, Moraes & Bonamigo, 2019, p. 101)

We researched the Brazilian academic literature productions on clinical and politics in order to identify the forces in the psychological device and how they act. Two important databases containing academic journals of Brazilian psychology were chosen, namely Scielo and Pepsic, from March to May 2022. We paired the following descriptors for the research: "clinic" and "politics", without specifying a time frame. We found a total of 257 papers. We excluded from our sample the papers focused on education, law, dentistry, medicine and public health, as well as the duplicated ones. Thus, 96 papers remained. From these, we performed a general analysis of the papers, excluding those that did not specifically address the politics in the psychological clinic device. So, we selected 54 papers, being the oldest from 2001. It is noteworthy that the analyzed papers address the discussion of the in-between aspects of the psychological clinic and politics, therefore, they talk through the facets of this device in a critical way.

In these remaining 54 papers, we map out the various clinical practices that point out the configuration of the forces in the psychological device, discussing

them from a critical perspective, referenced mainly by Gilles Deleuze, Félix Guattari and Michel Foucault. We have divided these characteristics into four axes. We used the myth of Pandora as a metaphor to our attempt to understand this configuration of forces. Pandora (the one who has all the gifts) is the first woman created on earth, at the behest of Zeus, punishing Prometheus for stealing the fire of the gods and giving it to men. She arrives on earth with a box that should not be opened. Moved by curiosity, Pandora opens the box, from which flew out over the earth all manner of misery and evil. Pandora's box represents the psychological clinic, from which we expect health and mental care, but may release several evils instead. The first three axes are considered the evils that flew out from Pandora's box, namely: colonizing practices, psychotechnocracy and capitalization of care. These axes act on the individual producing effects that reaffirm, reproduce and/or sustain power relations with different configurations of governing life. Pandora, realizing her mistake, tries to close the box, managing to keep the only positive gift in there: hope. Thus, the fourth axis maps out practices that can represent hope at the bottom of Pandora's box: hope, being the proposal for a critical political clinic.

Evils: Colonizing practices

From the perspective of the analyzed papers, we encountered some practices that reproduce a colonizing logic. Practices in which the movements are directed towards the maintenance of a hegemonic subjectivity colonized by eurocentric patterns. To colonize is to inhabit another space and impose habits and behaviors, in an imperialist way. It is not restricted to territorial domination, but rather in the transmission of values and production of a way of thinking, being and living, in which there is an indoctrination concerning the hegemonic morality perspective (Hur, 2013b). The colonized subjectivity sees itself from the perspective of the colonial domination and prejudice, thus nullifying its own potentialities and singularities.

Psychology in Brazil is structured from epistemological views that are based on the reproduction of models imported from Europe and the United States. Much of our academic output is directed to the understanding and reproduction of foreign thinkers (Hur, 2013a; Lanza, 2021). Colonized and colonizing psychology is based on a standard identity (Deleuze & Guattari, 1996), which is based on white and European production on mental health and psychic suffering, disregarding the reality of a large part of the Brazilian population, which is composed of an ethnic-racial variety (Veiga, 2019; Benedito & Fernandes, 2020; Oliveira, 2017; Rodrigues, Vêras & Teixeira, 2017; Tokuda, Peres & Andreo, 2016; Barros, 2005; Carneiro, 2020; Alves & Delmondez, 2015).

From eurocentric perspective of seeing the world, history and humanity, the clinical device creates a discourse that naturalizes the hierarchy between differences, organizing them into relations of power and oppression that are daily reproduced and reinforced, everywhere. It takes the colonial matrix as a

reference, covering up other narratives, which are made invisible to maintain patterns of power and subjection of individuals in society. History told from European perspective:

has taught all of us that there was a Classical Greece that originated Rome, that decayed and originated Middle Ages, that at some point became more flexible and originated Renaissance, opening the doors to Modernity. All this in Europe as a scenery, the radiating center of rationality and democracy to the world. We are so familiar with this discourse that we take it for granted, because Eurocentrism has established itself, throughout a series of historical processes, as the dominant paradigm in several spheres of human life and in the most diverse points of the globe (Alves & Delmondez, 2015, p. 654).

The naturalization of this belief also produced a standard representation of human being. The, white christian heterosexual property-owner educated civilized european man determines as another everything that is different from himself, enunciating what must be civilized, catechized and domesticated. This other is considered in the logic of the negative (Deleuze, 1997), being contemplated as inferior, marginal, and often criminal.

However, these discriminations are not always explicit and evident. They can occur in a subtler way, permeating actions of apparent care and protection, often silencing the suffering that these naturalizations may cause. Psychology can reinforce this in a number of ways. We identified in the analyzed texts some themes that refer to colonizing practices, among which we highlight eugenics, racism and patriarchy. Through an apparently neutral protective-controlling discourse, one can reinforce eugenic, racist and patriarchal beliefs, with controlling postures and silencing. By claiming to be neutral and scientific, psychological assumptions may be politically in favor of the colonial hegemonic discourse.

In this review, we come across a critical stand that the psychological device naturalizes biological and social traits, favoring the economic elites, but also white people and large cities, that is, who live in the urban space and not in the rural. It operates as an apparatus belt called by Foucault (2008) as the racist state.

Socially, the suffering produced by inequality, exploitation and lack of access is disqualified and minimized. The structural racism we see present in everyday institutions and relationships is ignored. In the clinic, the topic is often individually treated, emphasizing individual spheres of resilience and adaptation. It is suggested that the individual should be strengthened, learn to live with these situations, suppressing the social and political aspects involved. In this way, the therapeutic relationship can, and in fact is, another oppressive device on these lives. Races play roles of value defined by a hierarchy established by years of slavery and colonization, justifying the existence of the privileges of the dominating class, the white (Benedito & Fernandes, 2020). The naturalization of these privileges, the lack of opportunities and marginalization of black people is a great source of suffering. The clinic performing a colonizing practice can make invisible the suffering of the black body in the face of the inequalities generated by this perspective that places the white race as a standard and holder of

privileges. White is a standard of beauty, of superiority, it has access to opportunities and facilities. The black is considered as another, seen in the same negativity logic mentioned above, always in inferiority and deviation. "Eurocentrism and whiteness not only refuse that black people think about their own history, but also do not see themselves as part of it" (Benedito & Fernandes, 2020, p. 9).

The defined standards stratify social places to be occupied by individuals, as discussed by Benedito and Fernandes (2020). The memorization and reproduction of these patterns is assigned to individuals, who cannot even access the possibility of producing other ways of living. In the individualization of social issues, people are led to disregard the structural facet, personalizing racist behaviors. The discourse of resilience is used as a tool so the person can learn to "be strong", ignore these offenses and behaviors, suggesting greater personal effort and dedication to overcome the obstacles imposed by the lack of opportunities. This perspective silences the denunciation of structural racism, individualizing the issue and weakening collective agendas and resistance. It perpetuates the place of white people as superior, the one who will civilize the others. Thus, the race exercises

symbolic, evaluative and stratifying roles in multiracial and racist societies such as Brazil. The adoption of this concept allows the division between classes, in which the ideal status belongs to the white ruling class. These divisions and their consequences, racism, are not only the result of the historical process experienced in slavery, but are also the result of capitalist interests and, therefore, are maintained. (Benedito & Fernandes, 2020, p. 3)

Therefore, the clinical practice in this conjuncture must perform an analysis of its implication (Lourau, 1975) and the struggles it generates. The white psychologist must be aware of one's whiteness, recognizing how race may affect the therapeutic relationship.

the creation of the bond. Although this goal should be achieved in any therapeutic relationship, we highlight that among the repercussions of racism are the difficulty of establishing bonds and the representation of oneself as inferior, unpleasant, inadequate and a continuous sense of non-belonging, as well as the perception of the world as potentially violent (especially in the interracial relationship), which can influence the establishment of a bond with the therapist. (Tavares & Kuratani, 2019, p. 5)

Disregarding these aspects means perpetuating the reproduction of colonialism and the silencing of this suffering, which prevents the manifestation of the difference. The cynicism of the analyst and his whiteness can naturalize inequalities and ignore the privileges obtained through race, relegating to the fallacious discourse of meritocracy the social abysses that exist. "Whiteness operates as a device of power regulating the limits of analyzability. Therefore, a mechanism of colonialist power that gains materiality through institutional racism" (Apolonio & Verzman, 2022, p. 43). On many occasions the white

person does not recognize him/herself as racialized, seeing the white as a reference, turning the perception into the black body, which becomes the object of study and intervention.

The analysis of one's whiteness (Bento, 2002) is an essential step towards the deconstruction of a colonizing practice. Not only, though. The colonial bias of patriarchy is also reproduced in clinical practices, generating oppression as effect. Equally sustained by neutrality, the universality of androcentric thought is reproduced. Men is placed in a position of superiority, and women are subjugated in a place of submission and subservience. The gender hierarchy is often neglected by the clinical practice, where violence is reduced to dichotomies such as good/bad (Timm, Pereira & Gontijo, 2011). Without the psychologist ethical and critical commitment concerning the issue, in which said neutrality is sustained, clinical practice is reduced and:

based on individual subjective experience, privatizing people's pain and suffering. The history of this hegemonic practice atomizes, dissociates, fragments and *pathologizes* the subjective experience as if it was not related to its social context, as if everything was a matter of 'intimate forum'. [...] The critical analysis of patriarchy demands to rethink the impact of culture on the process of gender identities constitution and the consequences, such as individual subjectivities. [...] Women in this western patriarchal culture are constituted by men's perspective, feeling deeply helpless when they are not noticed and often conforming to a violent family or marital scene in order to prevent loneliness'. (Timm, Pereira & Gontijo, 2011, pp. 253-254)

Clinical device as a reproduction of patriarchy, therefore, repeats oppression thus disregarding subjectivation processes that break the cycle of submission and inferiority. It keeps women tutored and fragile, so they can be controlled. Such practice may be masqueraded as care and prudence. A male psychologist may listen to a woman performing the role of the protector, discouraging her from ruptures that may be necessary and urgent. A nuance easily perceived as care, which hides, however, the reproduction of social roles in which the man acts as the protector, and the woman is fragile and incapable, requiring a tutor.

both in the theories listed and in the reports by the women listened, the concept of family is still imprisoned in patriarchal, phallocentric and heteronormative structures and is reduced to the traditional model of the bourgeois nuclear reproductive family. [...] In this sense, Psychology itself (as well as other fields of knowledge – nursing, medicine, social work, etc.) needs to review its practices and concepts, considering its tendencies, often reductionist. (Tokuda, Peres & Andreo, 2016, p. 928)

Acknowledge colonizing practices is to remain in constant self-analysis, seeking other perspectives, questioning and problematizing the interpretations, observing the role we play in the therapeutic relationship, and its implications.

Evils: Psychotechnocracy

Technocracy is a term used to designate the use of scientific knowledge in the resolution of everyday problems and issues, that is, an administration made by specialists, a management of life carried out from fields of knowledge and technologies. Accordingly, we name as psychotechnocracy the attempt to manage life through psychology scientific and technical knowledge, that is, psychological expertise and techniques. These practices seek to promote a universal truth about human being and behavior. These regimes of statements, taken as truth, are guided, as Michel Foucault (1979) teaches us, by normalization, classification and pathologization. Consequently, psi practices can erase differences by adapting to socially accepted norms and standards.

Psychotechnocracy derives from disciplinary power, proposed by Foucault (1979). The french philosopher studies a new governmentality that emerge from knowledge regimes of techniques that articulate power relations that focus on life. Disciplinary power:

adopt new procedures, such as examination, surveillance, confinement in a space and time management. They describe traits of individuals, as well as they produce measures, molds, codes and statements in order to appropriate life, thus making it more effective and productive. Standardizing sanctions are used as interventions, which regulate behavior and correct deviations: body domestication. This utopia falls upon diagnose and correct, discipline and punish. The truth produced by these procedures is called 'norms' (Hur, 2018, p. 80).

Based on this, psychotechnocracy is the adaptationist and normalizing practices of psychological clinic, in which the psychologist is a kind of social orthopedist (Bicalho et al., 2009). For example, when we break a bone, we look for an orthopedist, who will put the bone back in place, plaster until it calcifies in the correct position. The orthopedic psychologist plays the same role: based on a norm, he identifies which bones are "out of place", that is, individuals with inappropriate, deviant behaviors, which must be put back in the correct position and plastered until they calcify. Norms that justify and update *status quo* values, that sustain logics in order to maintain domination and exploitation, reducing the production of individual differences, of multiplicity. Disciplinarization directly updates the forces diagram of discipline (Foucault, 2014b), in which knowledge and practices instituted by *psychology* create anatomopolitical and biopolitical norms to manage life (Hur, 2018).

The disciplinary clinical device reproduces psychotechnocratic practices. According to the papers studied in the literature review, psychotechnocracy is performed by vertical knowledge-power relations, permeated by neutrality, disciplinarization, adaptationism, medicalization, classifying and diagnostic homogenization, among other practices in which norm is preponderant (Barboza & Andrade, 2022; Safatle, 2017; Smith, 2005; Canavêz, 2017; Martins, 2008; Dettmann, Aragon & Margotto, 2016; Borba, 2014; Decotelli, Bohre & Bicalho, 2013).

Under the aegis of neutrality, Brazilian psychology went through the years of civil-military dictatorship (1964-1985) without being persecuted. Disregarding its political and social characteristics, separating politics and psychology (Hur, 2007), clinic is assumed as neutral, thus being disconnected from the reality that surrounds it, immersed in the inner world of the patient's self. Neutrality, objectivity and scientificity (characteristics of the positivist paradigm) describe the individual as a natural object that is not historically produced (Coimbra, 2004). This subject is seen as a center in conjunction with the dichotomy society x individual. These two realities are considered apart and separately analyzed, although they are intrinsically articulated (Barros, 2005).

During the dictatorship, taken as neutral, psychology penetrated the social sphere through a hygienist perspective of mental health (Oliveira, 2017). Assuming the discourse of neutrality implies decontextualizing and naturalizing power relations that have been historically built, taking them as given universal truths and individualizing issues. Hence, neutrality reinforces, often by omission, relations of oppression, depoliticizing and weakening people, whether at the individual or collective level. When a perspective is considered a universal truth, "it comprises a variety of blind spots, which will necessarily violate the perspective others" (Martins, 2019, p. 57). In other words, we consider that no truth is universal, it is always a point of view contemplating a specific reality, be it historical, cultural, social or economic. Therefore, neutrality as it is put does not exist. It must always be questioned, because it is permeated by the reality that surrounds it and produces it.

Neutral discourse, on that account, may corroborate situations of oppression, such as racism and sexism. In an unequal class society, it is necessary to analyze the roles we as well as our patients play in society. Psychology as a "neutral" discipline has already been used as a tool to pathologize physical differences (Benedito & Fernandes, 2020), justifying social domination. Currently, it can still be seen in the criminalization of black poor people, which associates social class and race with violence and drug addiction (Coimbra, 2006).

Psychotechnocratic practice widely contributes to body disciplinarization, where a norm to be achieved and maintained is established (Silva, 2005). By reinforcing norms concerning ways of living, classification and diagnosis are effective tools, as they standardize and quantify therapeutic relationships that should be unique. With respect to standardization, universal truths about humans are produced. The norm establishes the limits within which the individual must remain. In this sense, the clinical setting mingles with the hegemonic discourse that disregards multiplicity (Canavêz, 2017), which diagnoses, disciplines and regulates. Psychological techniques are used as a way of diagnosing, defining and limiting ways of being and living.

Another practice that characterizes psychotechnocracy is the production of diagnoses, which operate as a production of specific subjectivity: the discipline of subjectivity. As an effect, patients reproduce a limited discourse about themselves, embracing a high content of (self)codification, restricted by the identity affirmation of "this is me". This perspective limits the possibilities of

change, thus generating fatalism (Martín-Baró, 1998). Sadness to depressives. Lack of control to anxious ones. It consolidates normative stereotypes that are difficult to break through.

Along these lines, the creation and improvement of mental health diagnoses (International Classification of Diseases – ICD; *Diagnostical Statistical Manual - DSM*) imply the production of static norms and "a physicalist view of mental disorder. [...] As a consequence, the dialogue with the patients about their suffering loses importance, as well as the concern with their psychosocial context" (Martins, 2008, p. 332). These forces appear in the clinic from a social idealization of repairing what is not working: the pain, the symptom, the deviation. These forces appear in the attitudes of the patients themselves. There is a standard that rules and prioritizes certain ways of life. These norms establish an ideal pursued by individuals, who want to achieve them at any cost. Or yet, these forces may be part of the psychologist behavior, who may define the success of psychotherapy as the absence of anguish and symptoms, in search of immediate solutions and social adaptations to the patient's struggles.

Given what has been said, psychotechnocracy combines the diagnostic perspective with an intervention that aims to identify the symptoms to be erased and silenced through protocol techniques used to train and discipline people. Ultimately, the anesthesia of the insurgency, the suppression of anguish and the management of sensations are sought. These products are widely offered by psychology and psychiatry, in which behavior is standardized. It is a psychosocial hygienism whose purpose is analgesia as subjectivity (Martins, 2008).

Pain (symptom) or the lack of it as a reference for health (physical and mental) turns clinical practice into a protocol to accommodate and format certain models (Decotelli, Bohre & Bicalho, 2013). There is a multiplication of sickness roles, in which diverse behaviors are pathologized, resulting in the medicalization of health. Abnormality is attributed to what escapes the rules and norms set by work, school, church, family, discourses, etc. Deviations are recognized as pathological, they are medicalized and "corrected" (Martins, 2008).

In order to discipline bodies, childhood is also normalized through various diagnoses of learning and attention neurological disorders. Standardization of childhood establishes health and regular cognitive abilities. Those who don't fit are contained by medicalization. Life is regulated through the definition of an ideal behavior, learning and attention, which, in fact, sustains biopolitics, regulation and control of lives. In short, "monitoring of both efficiency and [...] existence in all their extension" (Decotelli, Bohre & Bicalho, 2013, p. 448).

We observe how psychotechnocracy permeates clinical practice. Supported by *psy* knowledge-power (whether from psychology, psychoanalysis or psychiatry), universal truths are established through classifying practices and normalization of behaviors, so certain ways of being in the world are reinforced. It is such a vigorous force that permeates daily practices. Even professionals self-acknowledged as critical end up being crossed by these forces, thus being psychotechnocratic.

Evils: Capitalization of Care

The bibliographic cartography revealed other characteristics present in the psychotherapeutic space, in the private practice, which we categorized as the capitalization of care. This category embraces neoliberal capitalist argumentation in mental health care practices and actions. Deleuze and Guattari (2010) affirm that capitalism must be seen as a semiotic machine that is updated in the most distinct instances, so they choose to call it as axiomatic of capital. Thus, from the intensification of neoliberalism, peculiar features of clinical device foster the production of a hegemonic subjectivity, whose manufacturing is serialized and international, encompassing the way the world is perceived and how it is articulated in society: capitalistic subjectivity (Guattari & Rolnik, 2006). In this category we observe the following characteristics: relationship between economy and subjective production, individualism, identity fixation, homogenization and massification of suffering, medicalization of health, psychology as a tool used to cover, naturalize and reproduce the exploitation guided by class inequality (Ceccim & Merhy, 2009; Cruz & Ferrari, 2011; Batista, 2013; Indursky & Conte, 2017; Moraes & Perrone, 2017; Sato, Martins, Guedes & Rosa, 2017; Kahhale & Montreozol, 2019; Kahhale, Costa & Montreozol, 2020).

Coimbra and Leitão (2003) highlight the direct relationship between economic relations and the productions of subjectivity; these are constituted by different social apparatuses, but they are articulated, since psychology is crossed by knowledge-power relations. The authors point out how much this capitalist territory produces, among other things, the "way-of-being-individual", a model that defines specific ways of being in the world to the detriment of others. This perspective is convergent with Guattari's statements that capitalism is primarily a factory of subjectivities (Lazzarato, 2014).

This way, individuality is exaggeratedly considered, taking precedence over collectivity. Self-identity is also emphasized, incited and modulated precisely in favor of the market imperative. The more categorizable, the more predictable, the more controllable and manipulable for the purposes of capital. There is the passage of a "technique of masses into [...] a machinery whose principle is no longer moving or motionless mass, but a geometry of divisible segments" (Foucault, 2014b, p. 160). In other words, the subject comes to be seen as a singular element to be articulated in a set that seeks greater efficiency and productivity.

In psychological clinic, one of the effects of this belief is the individualization of experienced vicissitudes. Care is instrumentalized to depoliticize and dismantle the political and social dimension of suffering, thus privatizing damage (Indursky & Conte, 2017). In other words, clinical intervention does not consider or associate collective facets of given suffering. It instead turns everything into internal and subjective scope. It displaces social issues to the individual sphere, that is, it discredits the social context as a way of blaming the person.

Considering capitalization of care, intervention proposals are fast and superficial. They follow a protocol as if they were a cake recipe, which promises

to solve anxiety attacks, panic disorders and *burnout* from individual perspectives that disconnect the person from immediate social reality. It ignores the entire cultural historical context, as well as the effects it engenders at the origin of certain suffering (Ceccim & Mehry, 2009; Cruz & Ferrari, 2011).

"Clinic is reduced to the imperatives of therapeutic efficacy and guarantee of short-term results" (Cruz & Ferrari, 2011, p. 162). The power of psychotherapy is reduced to symptom eradication by standard protocols, so the duration of the process is minimized as per the capitalist logic. One should also bring to this discussion the fee received by the psychologist, which is often disguised, not openly discussed, a "black box", however it is totally linked to the capitalization of care. As Baremlitt (1992) teaches us, it is an important analyzer of the process. In this context, psychology is another apparatus of neoliberal network, as a field of knowledge and practice that dictates truths about humans, based on its supposedly neutral expertise, but which continues with the bureaucratization of technical procedures in favor of productivism.

Poor classes cannot access therapy in many situations. Therapy is restricted to those who can afford it, considering that what is offered by the public health system is still insufficient for the demand. Social care offered by private professionals slightly mitigate this situation, although this practice is often guided by assistentialism and individualism (Silva & Bonatti, 2020). It is very common that clinical psychologists find their limit in the anguish arising from social inequality, which seems like a dead-end street, taking into account that some intervention devices do not problematizes these social and political issues.

Capitalization of care is performed through a productivist logic. Both by the financial bias, as by the results obtained. Patients are seen as "defective machines", so they must be "cured", "repaired", so that in the shortest period of time they resume their place in the great social productive gear. In short, we observe the therapeutic massification via the description of symptoms that silences violence in favor of the capital. This means that symptoms are homogenized and massified, encompassing increasingly large portions of people, and protocols are created and followed to managed life in a productive way. Thus, social violence resulting from exploitation and oppression is camouflaged with alleged care practices.

Some authors discuss the use of diagnosis-prescription procedures in behalf of longevity as the stagnation of singularity production (Ceccim & Merhy, 2009). With reference to consumption and capital, whose aim is maximum productivity, the symptoms are identified, the person is categorized, diagnosed and prescribed. Symptoms are silenced and, moreover, singularities are erased. What is unpredictable, and therefore uncontrollable, is nullified. This perspective occurs in conjunction with neoliberal individualist argumentation discussed above, which manages life via market-productivist viewpoint.

Another aspect that deserves to be highlighted is how psychological device becomes a drive belt of what has been constituted as health market. According to critical researchers, this market is basically focused on "medicalization of life" (Decotelli, Bohre & Bicalho, 2013). For such, the pharmaceutical industry of psychotropics, which moves immense profits, offers quick solutions in pills for

profuse emotional issues. In that regard, body and psyche are seen only in their mechanical dimension, in which certain medications would solve their adaptation problems, returning them to work. Ritalin is an emblematic example of what has been used for children, so they control their focus, attention, and increase production in schools. In other countries, such as the United States, amphetamines such as Adderal are prescribed to make workers and students increase production, thus corroborating hypertrophy of production. Health plans, permeated by this same logic, increasingly define and delimit the performance of professionals. "It is the criticism of the work captured by its management, by protocols, by its corporatization or by the rationalities in which it is inscribed or from where it unfolds" (Ceccim & Merhy, 2009, p. 532). Consequently, ways of acting, seeing, thinking and living are fostered, they are already outlined and standardized as per adaptation to capitalism and its demands. As Nikolas Rose (2013) criticizes, psychological devices are no longer concerned only with normalizing and encoding (psychotechnocracy) people, but rather with motivating the highest possible productivity of individuals taken as body-machines.

The papers reviewed show us how easily the clinic can be modulated by the hegemonic logic of capital. Practices that, by responding to capitalist demands, incite people into ways of living reduced and regulated by productivity and profit.

Hope: Proposition about a politicized clinical practice

Pandora's box was not all about evil. Hope was left at the bottom. Something that humans could turn to in order to survive chaos. Likewise, our bibliographic cartography indicates clinical practices that are capable of opposing the identified evils, politics of oppression, standardization and hyperproductivity. Among the evils, and in spite of them, there is hope. According to Paulo Freire, hope as a mobilizer of change, hope as a verb (2014). In opposition to immobility and fatalism, useful to groups of domination, hope incites action. It is a way of overcoming paralysis in face of difficult situations. The authors highlight how art, clinical friendship and autonomy can be an ally in this confrontation (Prandoni & Padilha, 2006; Martins & Peixoto Junior, 2013; Silveira, 2016; Cruz & Teixeira Filho, 2017; Safatle, 2017; Walter & Pine, 2017; Benedito & Fernandes, 2020).

Art helps producing differences in psychotherapy. In its interface, clinic and art activate other subjectivation processes, as per existential aesthetics. Art-clinical relationship may occur in two distinct ways: 1st in an instrumental dimension, in which art operates as an intervention device and 2nd the subjectivation process itself as an aesthetic experience.

Therapeutic and artistic processes are transversalized "through devices that enhance the aesthetic experience and its interferences in subjectivity and corporeality" (Santos et al., 2020, p. 69). That is, art is used as a way to reach oneself and a way of being in the world. Art in photography, painting, literature,

music, dance, etc., can foster life production. Art about everyday life may, for instance, help expressing beyond naturalized words and situations, promoting ruptures and movements that may guide someone into new possibilities to given situation. It can be a way of overflowing repressed and suffocated affections.

As an example of experiment, someone tries to access immediate reality through the lens of a camera, or by brushes, or by musical notes. It is possible that this produces displacements previously inaccessible by the automatism of everyday life. Reading poetry and short stories, or even their creation, can make room for the expression of affections previously repressed by socially predefined norms. There is no prefabricated recipe concerning our relation with art. Thus, psychological expertise is denaturalized, which enables attentive connection with the patient as well as space to new experiences.

As an illustration, Ernesto Neto believes on interactive art. This way of making art refuses contemplation, in which we only observe what was produced. It invites us instead to directly interact with the pieces of work, thus producing singular experiences. Cruz and Teixeira Filho (2017), when analyzing this artist, point out that

The signs that the artist creates by providing a differentiated atmosphere of interaction provokes the public's thinking and disorganizes it for a moment until thought recomposes it, however, not by reasoning, but by sensation, which transforms the spectators into artists themselves as they create ways of relating to the pieces of work. "Truth" becomes implied rather than absolute (p. 138).

On the other hand, some clinical practices visualize that subjectivation process itself is an aesthetic production, a self-reinvention. From the body composed of flow of affections and encounters, intensive states can emerge, which require the creation of something new. It is life that "takes place in the production of differences and their affirmation in new forms of existence" (Rolnik, 2015, p. 104). The author states art as a means of expressing the intensive differences that vibrate in people, or that make people vibrate. Not art in its formal dimension, permeated by rules and forms, commercially recognized. But intensive art instead: a venture against the deactivation of an experimental creation of existence process. The existence itself comprising non-predefined ways of expressing affections through experimentation, rejecting interpretation or reproduction. By experimenting, through aesthetic production, our relationship with the world and with others can activate creative processes and produce new forms of existence.

In accordance with Deleuze (1997, p. 139), "the conditions of a true critique and a true creation are the same: the destruction of an image of thought which presupposes itself and the genesis of the act of thinking in thought itself." So the interrelation between art and clinic provides us with the chance to leave the presumed representation of ourselves and the world to enable a rupture that can lead to creation comprising the body with its intensive affections.

In addition to art as a transmutation power, friendship was also pointed out as a clinical facet that increases one's potentia. Silveira (2016) believes that intervention in complex contexts comprises several resources and produces

different effects, among them the desire to create new networks of social relations, which may interrupt automatic processes in social life.

Alleging the psychotherapy political facet involves the understanding that dual or group relationships, in office or in the community, must comprise the whole complexity of contemporary subjectivity. The notions of individual and group need to be denaturalized, being understood as a particular effect of always collective subjectivation processes. (Silveira, 2016, p. 339)

For this author, the rupture of power relations enables different experiences, which allow singularities and new different ways of relating to others. The production of new social connections, as opposed to neoliberal individualism, is a possible clinical effect that refuses hierarchical privatizing normalizing practices. Thus, the affections that arise from a horizontal therapeutic relationship can promote the movements required to produce authentic ways of being in the world, in which the search for connections, new allies and friendship affections produce softness.

Another way of disrupting colonizing disciplinary pharmacological neoliberal psychology is autonomy. Autonomy refers to self-government, self-management, the opposite of heteronomy, which is a vertical, asymmetrical government (Castoriadis, 1982). So, the clinical device may foment processes to regain life regaining and potentia. To achieve this goal, Prandoni and Padilha (2006) believe in the importance of considering the uniqueness and history of each individual, refusing adaptationism, pursuing autonomy through self-care practices together with social and political changes. Working with singular subjectivities means operating transformations in one's life considering the specific history, affections and displacements. Using control as care or psychotechnocratic approaches only provides stagnation and immobilization when facing an identity that is assumed as deficient regarding an average. The production of autonomy encompasses creating new possibilities of life, as well as the recognition of basic rights and the possibility of managing your own life.

It is worth emphasizing how connected it is to intrinsically political and critical facets of the clinic. The individual cannot be analyzed apart from society. Relational dimensions of human being cannot be ignored, along with the forces that transversalize these relations (Coimbra & Monteiro de Abreu, 2005). So we believe in hope as an active clinical approach concerning the production and creation of different subjectivation, one that is not subjected, adapted nor disciplined, but instead categorically implicated in the production of desire. As Jô Gondar (2004) affirms: an insurgent desire., the act of creating inseparable from the experimentation of unprecedented ways of affecting and being affected.

The challenge of facilitating the emergence of creative processes in subjectivities crystallized in symptoms and excessive suffering now requires the constitution of an intermediate space of experimentation, in which the psychotherapist's body and affections is also claimed, so that transformation can take place in this aesthetic encounter. (Maciel Júnior & Kupermann, 2005, p. 8)

Hence, hope in psychotherapy is a rupture in politics of subjection, orthopedics and market logic identified earlier. It implies an ethical aesthetic political posture of the psychologist, which enables the emergence of inventive and desiring processes capable of displacing the individual from fixed identity. An invention process of other selves. Experimentation of other ways of occupying the world and the relationship with oneself, others and nature. Crystallized subjectivities die so that it is possible to become something else.

Conclusion

This paper, as unveiled by the bibliographic cartography, outlines the politics in psychological clinical device. An implication analysis is required so psychologists may ethically offer professional support, since clinics may produce or reproduce oppressive and excluding discourses. However, we believe how powerful psychotherapy could be if used as a way of promoting autonomy and transformation towards free and authentic ways of life.

The papers investigated cartographs four categories that psychopolitically characterize the clinic: colonizing practices, psychotechnocracy, capitalization of care and hope. The first refers to oppression, the colonization of subjectivities and the maintenance of a dominating hierarchy, whose target is the conservation of the privileges of part of society based on Eurocentric standards. The second is based on discipline, which frames life in norms and manages it based on universal truths about humanity and their behavior. The third is grounded in neoliberal logic, the axiomatic of capital, controlled by economic and production relations, massifying and serializing the ways of living and relating to others, acting in favor of the market and capital, reinforcing individualism, identity fixation and medicalization of life, instrumentalizing psychology in order to accelerate productivity in any instance. The fourth, which is the approach we believe in, unveils politicized practices, those implicated in singularities and production of differences. Hope is a way of opposing forms of oppression, domination and hierarchization identified in the previous axes. A way of fomenting changes by collectively strengthening resistance, as opposed to fatalism and immobility.

In conclusion, we believe in an ethical approach, which approximates individual and collective political forces. It works through an experimental and creative attitude towards the production of life, enabling processes of subjectivation that produce reality by denaturalizing what is stated by the hegemonic and dominant social order. A clinic based on deviation, which destabilizes the order taken as natural and dares to invent new ways of being, thinking and feeling life.

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Care in psychology and social subjectivity: Representations, practices, and possibilities

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Abstract

Taking the Theory of Subjectivity and its critical-propositional, cultural-historical and complex perspective as a standpoint, this paper aims to discuss two different ways in which Psychology represents and practices care: as (re)directing and as treating people, both justified as intending to do what is “best” for them. We highlight how these representations and actions related to them match the dominant social subjectivity’s homogenizing, standardizing and pathologizing movement towards people, as well as its correction technologies. Overall, we discuss care in Psychology as the representation of a space of existential fabric and, therefore, as a necessarily ethical-political endeavor.

Keywords

care, Psychology, psychologists, subjectivity, dialogic

González Rey's Theory of Subjectivity, from a critical-propositional, cultural-historical and complex standpoint (Goulart et al., 2021; Mitjáns Martínez, 2022; Vaz & Mori, 2023), looks at subjectivity as the ontological foundation of the human, and thinks of it as a complex system whose distinctive quality is to integrate the emotional and the symbolic in the conditions of culture (González Rey & Mitjáns Martínez, 2017). This necessarily demands discussing what is meant by culture in this perspective. In the words of González Rey (2017), “Culture is a symbolic system within which various human practices and normative systems foster life for the persons who share one particular culture” (p. 182). The verb “to foster” has several definitions, which gain meaning depending on the context they are in. Among these meanings, we have “to create” and “to nurture.” When discussing culture, we understand that both of them have heuristic value, whether in more literal and concrete forms, or in more metaphorical and abstract ones. Taking this into account, it is our understanding that using the Theory of Subjectivity as a resource for representing and giving meaning to human processes in the various fields of human experience in which

the study of the Theory of Subjectivity has been developed, necessarily requires that one thinks about culture in the ways in which, in this system, people jointly produce ways of creating and nurturing life for each other; that is, in the ways in which care is a recursive condition of culture itself. We believe that reflecting on care within the scope of the Theory of Subjectivity is one of the most crucial breakthroughs yet to be set in motion from this/in this perspective.

In this sense, as we understand care as a dimension of culture, we also understand it as a subjective production, since, in the Theory of Subjectivity, culture itself is seen this way:

“Subjectivity configures cultural acts and processes per se; that is, culture is a subjectively produced system. Only the generative quality of subjectivity keeps the culture alive and determines the existence of a recursive process through which each of those acts and processes is intrinsic to the development of the other. This living process is impossible to capture in any static definition of culture as something given objectively” (González Rey, 2016, p. 11). Therefore, what we propose when thinking about care in this sense is to discuss it without approaching it from any *a priori*, universal, external, direct, linear and univocal cause-and-effect perspectives, but as being socially and historically organized. Nonetheless, this does not mean understanding care as devoid of an objective character, but reflecting on this character as subjectively constituted, insofar as “(...) individuals exist for a shorter time than the duration of cultural development. Therefore, each human generation is born within a well-established cultural world that creates the illusion of culture as being an objective world” (González Rey, 2017, p. 182).

We highlight that recognizing this objective character of care does not imply thinking of it as homogeneous, precisely because it is configured subjectively. In each generation of people – and several generations cohabit in each given historical moment of a society (González Rey, 2017) –, different paths of subjective conformation of care are and will be outlined, as each person, group and institution will subjectively produce different ways of living it.

Having made these considerations, for the purposes of this work, we discuss care by focusing our reflection on the social dimension of subjectivity. Nonetheless, we wish to reinforce that, in the Theory of Subjectivity, as subjectivity configures a new quality of process in its emotional-symbolic integration, it is simultaneously individual and social. Therefore, the emphasis on social subjectivity is not organized here as a dichotomy, but as a reflection prism to think about macro dimension processes that are a part of care. In this way, it is fundamental to include the theoretical category “social subjectivity,” which we use in our considerations. However, to do so, we understand that it is better to first present the theoretical categories “subjective sense” and “subjective configuration,” given that they are the ones that, when articulated, represent and signify the subjective processes.

In the Theory of Subjectivity, subjective sense is the most basic, elementary, and dynamic unit of subjectivity (González Rey & Mitjáns Martínez, 2017). In their genesis, emotions become symbolic and the symbolic becomes emotional, creating, in this union, and without establishing a linear and direct

relationship of cause and effect, the subjective nature of the experience (González Rey, 2005, 2015). Subjective senses emerge in every human experience, arising well beyond intentionality and consciousness, and they take shape in different forms amid different actions (Mitjáns Martínez & González Rey, 2017).

The subjective configuration, in turn, represents a stable formation of subjective senses whose aggregating principle is their high convergence (Mitjáns Martínez & González Rey, 2017). This stability does not mean that subjective senses and subjective configurations lose their dynamic attribute, or that specific subjective senses can only conform to a single subjective configuration, or even that only identical subjective senses are articulated. It means that, in the subjective configuration, by virtue of the convergence that leads to its organization, even if they are reorganized, certain subjective senses carry, in relation to one another, great importance in the subjective processes.

Therefore, when thinking about care in terms of its subjective conformation in social subjectivity, we are thinking about care in terms of its complex, dynamic, and procedural organization in the concrete history of a society in its culture. This organization occurs between subjective senses that converge with each other, and between subjective configurations thus formed – and due to the relationship of these senses and these configurations with what is experienced as care in different fields of experience, relationships and moments of people, groups, and institutions. That is, we are thinking about care, in its subjective conformation, in “(...) an integrated system of subjective configurations (in group and individually) that are articulated at different levels of social life” (González Rey, 1997, p. 133), which is precisely social subjectivity. As a matter of fact, this is one of the great values of the Theory of Subjectivity: to represent and signify human processes, and to advance theoretically in this direction, by allowing the articulation of what was experienced in its diversity and complexity in a configurational logic (Mori, 2020, 2021). Thus, social subjectivity involves the ways in which discourses, social representations, myths, beliefs, morals, ideology, language, symbols are subjectivized, as well as social productions that outline a culture in a given time of a society, such as religions, race, gender, constructions about childhood, old age, health and illness, among others (González Rey & Mitjáns Martínez, 2017), such as care itself.

In the next section, we turn our attention to what is called dominant social subjectivity (González Rey & Mitjáns Martínez, 2017), as well as to the type of psychology that, in our understanding, simultaneously supports it and is supported by it: mainstream psychology (De Vos, 2012; Parker, 2007, 2020). It is our understanding that the relationships that they maintain with each other have managed care representations and care practices of Psychology as (re)direction and treatment based on doing what is believed to be “best” for people; therefore, it is crucial that we detail these relationships.

Dominant social subjectivity, mainstream psychology and care

When discussing social subjectivity, it is always important to situate which sphere of analysis one is talking about. We emphasize that social subjectivity is characterized as a level of subjectivity by the distinctive quality of its processes, and not because it refers to a certain *a priori* scale of people sharing a specific culture. It is possible to think of social subjectivity, for example, when talking about a family, a group, an institution in its entirety, different groups within an institution, a group of institutions, a country or different groups within a country. It is even possible to speak of the social subjectivity of a continent or of the world, considering both the globalization processes and their impact on local cultures (Latour, 2017/2020a) and the cultural sharing promoted by the interweaving of digital devices and the Internet to existence and to life (Segata & Rifiotis, 2021). It is also possible to think of social subjectivity by discussing the interactive and recursive articulation of different social subjectivities configuring each other. In this case, when thinking about a subjective social conformation that involves several subjective social conformations in a complex relationship, it is reasonable to discuss the theoretical category “dominant social subjectivity” It designates, in the Theory of Subjectivity, a social subjectivity that comes to exert certain hegemony, due to its stability and strength, in the configuration of a configuration of social subjectivities. In a way, even when talking about the social subjectivity of a family, a group, an institution, etc., and even if the sphere of analysis is smaller when compared to a situation in which one talks about the configuration of a configuration of social subjectivities, this sphere of analysis is always liable to be referred to in relation to broader spheres of social subjectivity and, thus, of a certain dominant social subjectivity.

With that in mind, we clarify and emphasize that the dominant social subjectivity that we refer to in this work concerns a very broad, global sphere of analysis, whose domain was established in recursive feeding to mainstream psychology. We historically situate this dominant social subjectivity and mainstream psychology in social, cultural, economic, political, ideological, and institutional outlines organized from the 18th and 19th centuries (Danziger, 1997; Figueiredo, 1992/2017), primarily in the West, but whose presence, contemporarily, can be found all over the world. As discussed by two of us in a previous work (Vaz & Mori, 2022), this dominant social subjectivity notably derives from the establishment of the big four: science-technique-industry-economy (Morin, 2007/2011), in its links with governmentality and the inscription of subjectivity that both demand of Psychology (Foucault, 1991; Rose, 1998). It also has to do with the ways in which the processes of globalization and the digitalization/virtualization of existence and life have promoted and expanded both the psychologization of the human, engendered by mainstream psychology, and the spectacularization of the psychological and the psychologized (Vaz & Mori, 2022).

It is possible to argue that mainstream psychology concerns only one type of psychology, which questions why we choose to speak of Psychology as a whole when discussing it, taking into consideration that many other psychologies

were woven, even in order to confront it, overcome it and dethrone its hegemony. However, what we defend is that mainstream psychology, much more than a type of psychology, and due to the strength and stability that its relations with the dominant social subjectivity confer it, organizes itself as a privileged way to do Psychology, to the extent that what we call Psychology turns out to be, always, the subjective production of the people who dedicate themselves to it (Mitjans Martínez & González Rey, 2017). In this way, even the psychologies that aimed and aim to combat mainstream psychology, in many regards, ended up and end up identical or similar to it (González Rey, 2007; Neubern, 2004), precisely because of how present it is in the subjective constitution of people, groups, institutions and culture itself.

In articulation with the dominant social subjectivity, mainstream psychology comes to represent and produce care in Psychology as aimed at planning and executing psychological interventions on people and their trajectories – in the most diverse ways and in all fields of existence. It does so because it understands that the focus of Psychology is, *par excellence*, the universal, static, hermetic individual, which, in this perspective, is solitarily responsible and accountable for themselves and for their path. In mainstream psychology, Psychology is likely to predict and control individuals as a neutral and objective undertaking detached from history and culture. In this way, the care of Psychology as a necessarily interventionist practice focuses on individual and “social” (a psychologized social, taken as a mere agglomeration of individuals) “well-being,” “quality of life” and “health” (absence of disease). Here, well-being, quality of life and health are taken as the alignment and framing of people to the world “as it is”; that is, they are taken as the alignment and framing of people to the culture related to the dominant social subjectivity, experienced as given and unchangeable (as we previously discussed when considering the subjectively produced experience of culture to be “objective,” as if this objectivity meant that there is a single reality, consistently identical to itself, in spite of us and what we produce).

As operators of Psychology care as an interventionist practice, dominant social subjectivity and mainstream psychology generate two different types of subjectivity technologies (Rose, 1998), which are complementary: those of (re)direction and those of treatment. The first aim of diagnosing people is to put them on the “right path,” attainable by the adoption of prescriptions and interdictions made by Psychology. The second aim, in turn, is to diagnose people to “cure” them, also through prescriptions and interdictions, so it is likely they can eventually be put on the “right path.” Initially, the (re)directive and treatment interventions were configured subjectively from the need to separate the good, the proper, the right, the sacred, the pure, the normal, the moral, the civilized, the healthy and the sane from the evil, the bad, the wrong, the profane, the filthy, the abnormal, the immoral, the savage/barbaric, the sick and the crazy. They assume these molds based on modern dichotomous values constituted through institutions that organize existence, such as the law, the State, family, work, and religion (Bauman, 1997; Foucault, 1961/2010). As new and different processes were historically organized, new (re)directive and treatment interventions were

also engendered. They are based on the strength and stability of productivity, success, happiness (Birman, 2010; Cabanas & Illouz, 2019), resilience and later antifragility, positivity (Freire Filho, 2010), authenticity (Figueiredo, 1992/2017) and self-realization (Rose, 1998) as intrinsic capacities everyone has, and which work in the same manner for everyone (you simply must want it), acquired in the conformation of dominant social subjectivity and mainstream psychology in postmodernity.

These two groups – modern and postmodern (re)directive and treatment interventions – are not mutually exclusive, quite the contrary. These tight historical divisions are merely a theoretical resource to represent and signify reality (Delumeau, 1984/2007; Latour, 2010/2020b), especially considering what we already pointed out in relation to the heterogeneity of culture and the coexistence of different generations and different subjective productions in the same historical period. Thus, modern and postmodern (re)directive and treatment interventions coexist, interact and relate in the ways in which they are subjectively configured in people, groups, institutions and culture. They benefit enormously from the epistemological silence of Psychology (González Rey, 2013) and its consequent favoring of an ethical-political void (Figueiredo, 2004/2015) in the subjective conformation of care in this science and profession.

Care as an existential fabric

Based on what has been said, in this section, we look at care differently. The perspective from which we see it in this work, when thinking of it as the ways jointly and recursively produced by people to create and nurture life for each other at the level of culture, involves looking at it as an existential fabric. This means understanding care as a relational space in which paths and places to exist not only are organized but organize themselves – even though these paths and places, frequently and contradictorily, come to generate and/or aggravate subjective suffering, both on an individual level and on a social one. In the case of Psychology, this reflection demands that we problematize the ways in which people, groups, institutions, and culture itself suffer from favoring the terms of subjectivation engendered by the dominant social subjectivity and by mainstream psychology. Therefore, this reflection also necessarily incurs in questioning the ways in which people, groups, institutions, and culture itself suffer due to the directions and stances of care that constitute human processes through prescription and interdiction (Figueiredo, 2007), as the psychological interventions of (re)direction and treatment.

In our understanding, this happens, partly, due to the very definition of care as a psychological intervention, in which care comes to be understood and experienced by psychologists as the application of *a priori* and external knowledge to the other. This definition allows for the professional performance to organize itself as a technical and instantaneous action upon the other, which was prefabricated for them. Thus, the relationship with the other is hierarchical, and it is based on the premise that they need psychologists and Psychology to

guide and change them (Mori, 2019). This keeps the other in a position of passivity, dependence, and subjection, and configures the omnipotence and immediacy that we believe to define Psychology historically and contemporaneously.

From the perspective of the Theory of Subjectivity, care as a psychological intervention loses its heuristic and action value due to the generative, self-generating and multiply constituted and constitutive character of subjectivity in its dynamism, process and recursiveness. In this way, the knowledge of psychologists about the other can only take shape precisely from the relationship with this other, as well as the specific quality of this relationship (Vaz & Mori, 2023). Knowledge that is prior and external to them but present in their conformation does not appear as an *a priori* determination of what the other is and needs, as some sort of “copy and paste.” This knowledge, which psychologists possess due to their concrete trajectories, their studying, their experience, their paths, and places to exist, emerges as a tool to represent and give meaning to what is developed in the relationship and to the other’s subjective processes. It helps psychologists move forward in two ways. The first of these is in the understanding of what unfolds in the relational “in between,” so that this knowledge is not configured, therefore, as an applied knowledge, but as a continuously organized knowledge in the experienced and reflective path of psychologists regarding the relationship and the subjective processes of the other. The second way relates to authorial production, by the psychologists, of their action, a movement that involves creativity and creation in their positioning in their relationship with the other – and not only through the alterity that arises from being with this concrete other, but with the alterity that also emerges in the relationship of each psychologist with themselves (Figueiredo, 2004/2015).

Thus, in the Theory of Subjectivity, psychologists are not seen as interveners in the subjective processes of the other, but as facilitators (González Rey et al., 2016) – and as facilitators of the emergence of new subjective senses and of new and/or different subjective processes (González Rey, 2007, 2011a). Psychologists are seen, then, as facilitators of the subjective production, by the other, of new ways and places to exist. That is, psychologists are understood as facilitators for the other to subjectively produce their own existential fabric, their own care, with the implications, responsibilities and consequences that arise from this process. Therefore, the other takes on an active, autonomous, and leading role. In this perspective, psychologists do not care for the other by intervening on their behalf, by univocally directing them to the “right path,” or by prescribing and interdicting. They take care of the other in two ways. The first one involves seeking to facilitate the configuration of their relationship with the other as a dialogical space (González Rey, 2005; Mori, 2020, 2021), as a significantly distinguished communication space in which, due to the subjective engagement of the people involved, the spontaneous, the unexpected, the unpredictable, the uncontrollable, the contradictory, the experimentation and the reflection process appear, and, alongside them, the possibility of emergence of new subjective senses and of new and/or different subjective processes. The second way, in turn, involves psychologists seeking to sustain, in the other’s time and for as long as

the other takes, their mobilizations and movements, as well as their advances and “setbacks” – which are crucial for advances.

In this sense, we emphasize that when the understanding of care as a psychological intervention no longer stands, the same will happen to the understanding that the mere offer, by psychologists, of what they understand and experience as care does not necessarily mean that the other who seeks care is being cared for. We highlight that there is a very significant difference between making ourselves available, as psychologists, to care for the other, and between this other subjectively living the experience of being cared for by us. When we are willing to take care of the other, the forms and postures that we call care are thus taken by us from ourselves, in a way that our actions towards those who seek to be cared for are related to how we subjectively configure care, and to what we offer from that. Secondly, the forms and postures are taken as care not only by us, but also and mainly by the other, and from the ways in which, alongside them, we subjectively configure this relationship.

In this perspective, it is our understanding that care as an existential fabric demands both the willingness to care for the other and the continuous openness and restlessness to understand what it is that this other experiences as care, with the aim of shaping professional action in a way that is sensitive to the uniqueness of their processes (Vaz & Mori, 2023). We also understand that it is the recursive interlocution between such disposition, and such continuous openness and restlessness, which makes care necessarily ethical-political. This interlocution demands that we question, as psychologists, which postures we will adopt, how these postures will take place, and at the service of what, who, and what paths and places to exist. These questions permeate us in our trajectories as care professionals, also based on how we subjectively configure our stories and life projects, our culture and our citizenship. Thus, care commands us to constantly dedicate ourselves to understanding and taking responsibility for our own subjective processes, as well as the subjective processes of our culture, given that it is from them that we are willing not only to care for the other, but also to become sensitive to the other in their subjective processes.

Taking all this into account, finally, we argue that care as an existential fabric still requires reflection on the representations through which Psychology has given meaning to human processes in three areas: a) in the participation of the other in them, which we extensively discuss in this work; b) in the “rivalry” of preponderance, in the subjective conformation of care, between past, present and future, and c) in the logic of directing care to certain human processes to the detriment of others.

With regard to the participation of the other in human processes, when care is experienced as an existential fabric, it is necessary to re-dimension ideas such as introjection (González Rey, 2004) of care, in which the ways we are cared for speak, in an univocal and privileged manner, of the ways through which we will take care of other. We understand that, yes, they come to participate in the subjective configuration of care, but that, when considering it in its complex nature, this level of prediction and determination is necessarily put in check - because care, as a subjective production, configures itself conjointly and

recursively to the culture and the experience in its multiplicity. This also involves pointing out that, even in the face of the strength and stability of the dominant social subjectivity and of mainstream psychology in favoring the subjectivation of care as a (re)direction and treatment intervention, the emergence of differentiated care representations and practices does not become impossible, quite the contrary. If the other as a caregiver does not predict or determine who we will be as caregivers, then the dominant social subjectivity and mainstream psychology, as other with a broader dimension, cannot do this either. It is from this that alternatives arise, in relation to the hegemonic ones, in the scope of care. We also emphasize that the other that we talk about in this work is always a concrete other, socially and historically configured, be it a person, a group and/or an institution. Just as we do with care, we do with the other, stripping them of any *a priori*, universal, external, direct, linear and of univocal cause-and-effect perspectives. We also consider that care as an existential fabric (able to produce subjective processes of new and different qualities, as well as able to produce life alternatives and protagonism) can only happen when the other is experienced as a truly other: as someone different and, therefore, free in relation to what we are and what is ours as psychologists. Difference is the foundation of the dialogic and dialogue and, therefore, of the care we are talking about in this work.

In turn, the fight implemented by Psychology between past, present and future in the subjective conformation of care also loses its value – because, in the Theory of Subjectivity, the past and the future are integrated in the current subjective production, configuring a subjective temporality (González Rey & Mitjáns Martínez, 2017). This means recognizing that care as a subjective process, both in its historical dimension and in what is dreamed, fantasized, and projected as its future, is configured and configures itself in the procedural course of the current moment of people, groups, institutions and culture. Again, this is where alternatives are produced, in ways of caring, in relation to the dominant configuration.

Finally, we turn to the logic of separating human processes (González Rey, 2011b) and directing care to some of them to the detriment of others. This dynamic loses its heuristic and action value, along with the notion of psychological intervention, as we abandon the understanding that care happens magically from actions, on the part of psychologists, focused on human processes according to the division that Psychology created for them. Care does not magically happen because psychological interventions are directed to cognition, affection, thinking, feeling, language, behavior, development, learning, creativity, etc. We understand that it is people, groups, and institutions that should be cared for, and that proposing ourselves to take care of them involves recognizing them in the emotional-symbolic integration of their experience, and in its entirety. When care is fixed as a “function” of certain human processes to the detriment of others, care ends up incurring the same logic of psychological intervention, since this separation of human processes partly underlies the importance that the application has in this sphere.

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From the fragmentation of the individual in the biopsychosocial model to a conception of totality: Theoretical-political implications

Flávia Gonçalves da Silva & Sandro Henrique Vieira de Almeida

Abstract

Most professionals in the health arena refer to biological, psychological and social aspects as part of a health process that is based on the biopsychosocial model. This model emerged in contrast to the biomedical model and tries to understand health and individuals in an integral form. The argument is that the attention given to health should be multidisciplinary to investigate the three aspects that name it, but that the individual is fragmented in order to try to sum the parts. Another aspect that shows this fragmentation is the dominance of one of the dimensions in the explanation of the individual's condition, seeing genetics and/or neural constitution as the main causes of disorders, while the social aspects are said to facilitate or provoke something that is already present in the individual, determined by biological aspects. The biopsychosocial model promotes the pathologization and medicalization of processes that are psychosocial and, therefore, must be understood in their totality. A conception of totality in health should start from the understanding that the individual is constituted in a historical-cultural way, considering their biological possibilities, which are also determined by social aspects. The aim of this article is to reveal the fragmentation of the biopsychosocial model based on Cultural-Historical Psychology, whose theoretical-methodological assumptions are based on historical-dialectical materialism. The understanding of health and the individual in totality allows for the investigation and/or intervention that strive for human emancipation, which necessarily requires breaking with political and economic positions that lead to repression and dehumanization.

Keywords

Cultural-Historical Psychology, biopsychosocial model, biopsychosocial unity

Introduction

The political dimension has always been part of the constitution and understanding of reality as a whole, whether in everyday interpersonal

relationships, in the way of understanding the world based on practical experiences, or in the more elaborate ways of producing knowledge, such as philosophy, art and science. From the scientific aspect, it means that every production and its uses answer to certain interests and aspects of reality, in order to attend to specific groups that hold power as well as to minimize human adversities, among other possibilities.

In a recent example, widely broadcast in the media, numerous health professionals defended and prescribed (doctors, in this case) the use of chloroquine and hydroxychloroquine to prevent and treat COVID-19, even when there was scientific evidence that the aforementioned drugs were ineffective. In Brazil, most of the professionals who prescribed the use of chloroquine and hydroxychloroquine were aligned to right or extreme right-wing political ideologies. Those who followed these ideological perspectives, including governmental officials, in addition to defending and prescribing those drugs, denied the seriousness of COVID-19, which led to the absence or delay in the elaboration and development of public policies that could have minimized the harm the pandemic inflicted on most of the population.

Although the example above refers to the use of a product based on scientific studies, the political dimensions also influence what and how it is studied. The experiments conducted by Nazi scientists during World War II demonstrate the seriousness of this situation. Another example is the construction of a eugenic science and the development of research involving participants that were considered sub-human, such as Jews, people with disabilities, autistic, homosexuals, gypsies, which caused serious ethical issues (Greco, Welsh, 2016; Sheffer, 2019; Rezende, 2019).

Psychology, as a science, is not exempt from the political dimensions, either in the professional actions of psychologists that work in diverse areas, or in the theories that guide psychological practices. The various texts that make up this collection show this, whether with evidence of professional practices such as theoretical-methodological analyses of specific theories in the field of psychology, or in specific knowledge areas. This text is an analysis of a hegemonic conception of health today – the biopsychosocial model – from Cultural-Historical Psychology, which has as its theoretical-methodological assumptions dialectical and historical materialism. Thus, the aim of this text is to present, based on the foundations of Cultural-Historical Psychology, arguments that highlight the fragmentation of the biopsychosocial model as well as the maintenance of processes of the naturalization and biologization of the subject as a whole and of the world they in. In order to present the arguments about the fragmentation of the individual promoted by the psychosocial model, this text is organized in two parts. The first part presents the model in general terms, highlighting the advances in relation to the biomedical model and the challenges that have not yet been overcome, either because of problems in its implementation or in its conception, which is the main object of analysis of this text. The second part highlights the theoretical-methodological aspects of Historical-Cultural Psychology concerning the understanding of the individual in a perspective of totality, using as its method of analysis the decomposition into

units to confront the weaknesses identified in the biopsychosocial model and highlight possibilities of overcoming them.

The biopsychosocial model

George Engel was a pioneer in discussions about the need to overcome the biomedical model. He argued that it was necessary to develop a model that considered diseases not only in the constitution of health, but a model that included the individual as part of the process. In an article published in 1977 in the journal *Science*, Engel, a psychiatrist who adopted as reference psychosomatic theory, presented the need for psychiatry and medicine in general to overcome the biomedical model in order to adopt the model he called biopsychosocial. According to Engel (1977), in the 1970's, psychiatry was going through a crisis as it could not understand if the types of psychic suffering it investigated, and in which doctors intervened, were in fact diseases. At the time, diseases were understood as a form of biological dysfunction that could be measured.

To Engel (1977) there were two groups of psychiatrists. On the one hand, there were those who understood that psychiatry was not part of medicine, as it was not possible to comprehend suffering the same way biomedical medicine did. The other group of psychiatrists were those who restricted illnesses to brain dysfunctions. The psychiatrists that belonged to the first group defended the idea that it was the role of medicine to treat diseases and that the behavioral problems caused by “problems of living” could be treated with educational processes. Therefore, they were not issues related to psychiatry.

Implicit in this argument is the premise that while the medical model constitutes a sound framework within which to understand and treat disease, it is not relevant to the behavioral and psychological problems classically deemed the domain of psychiatry. Disorders directly ascribable to brain disorder would be taken care of by neurologists, while psychiatry as such would disappear as a medical discipline. (Engel, 1977, p. 378).

On the other hand, the biomedical conception of mental disorders

assumes disease to be fully accounted for by deviations from the norm of measurable biological (somatic) variables. It leaves no room within its framework for the social, psychological, and behavioral dimensions of illness. The biomedical model not only requires that disease be dealt with as an entity independent of social behavior, it also demands that behavioral aberrations be explained on the basis of disordered somatic (biochemical or neurophysiological) processes. (Engel, 1977, p. 379).

Throughout the article, Engel (1977) reinforces the need to contemplate the biological dimensions, but affirms that they could not explain all the manifestations of the illness or suffering, as it was necessary to take into

consideration how the person felt that condition, what meanings the individual attributed to it, and if and how the individual considered themselves sick. Assuming or not the position and the engagement in the therapeutic process were factors that could not be neglected. To the author, it was not enough to identify the biological alterations that happened in a specific disorder, it was necessary to relate the alterations with the psychological aspects of each individual.

Diabetes and schizophrenia have in common the fact that conditions of life and living constitute **significant variables influencing** the time of reported onset of the manifest disease as well as of variations in its course. In both conditions this results from the fact that psychophysiologic responses to life change **may interact with existing somatic factors** to alter susceptibility and thereby influence the time of onset, the severity, and the course of a disease. (Engel, 1977, p. 385, our emphasis).

In addition to understanding the importance of social and psychological factors in illnesses and suffering, Engel (1977) points out the relevance of the relationship between doctor and patient, in particular the need for professionals to be able to evaluate factors that cannot be observed in laboratory tests. The biopsychosocial model would explain why certain experiences cause illnesses and/or intense suffering for certain people, while others see them as living conditions (Engel, 1977). It is the doctor's role to identify these situations and understand that he or she cannot solve everything, but it is necessary to work with other health professionals. Therefore, doctors need adequate training to develop skills that allow them to evaluate not only the biological, but also the psychological and social aspects (Engel, 1977).

In order to provide the basis to understand the determinants of a disease, its treatment as well as standard rational health care, a medical model should also take into account the patient, the social context they are inserted in and the complementary system planned by society to deal with the disruptive effects of the disease. That is the role of the doctor and of the health system. This requires a biopsychological model. (Engel, 1977, p. 386, free translation).

Engel's propositions are the foundation for the biopsychosocial model adopted until today. Even though his name is not mentioned in many studies, to those who defend the model, understanding it as taking into consideration the biological, psychological and social aspects of health and illness, allows health professionals to see the individual in a holistic form. This requires not only the action of doctors, but also a whole multidisciplinary team (Pereira, Barros, & Augusto, 2011; Greco, 2016; Rezende, 2019; Tripathi, Das & Kar, 2019; Leiva-Peña, Rubí-González & Vicente-Parada, 2021).

Concerning public policies, this conception guided the creation of multidisciplinary health teams, for example, in primary care that is characterized as a set of actions to prevent and promote health, control chronic diseases, and palliative care at the individual or collective level. In Brazil, one of the main health strategies at this level of care is the Family Health Strategy (*ESF*, in the

Portuguese acronym) (Brazil, 2012). Professionals that work with *ESF* are doctors with general training or specialists in family health; they can also be general nurses or specialists in family health, nursing assistants or patient care technicians and community agents. From 2008 to 2020¹, it was compulsory that Brazilian municipalities provided training to multidisciplinary teams related to the Expanded Center for Family Health and Primary Care (*NASF-AB*, in the Portuguese acronym). The teams included physiotherapists, psychologists, social workers, pharmacists, nutritionists and other professionals involved in primary care. These professionals were oriented by the *ESF* team and provided matrix support to *ESF*.

In terms of professional education, in addition to the undergraduate health courses theoretically emphasizing the biopsychosocial model as the guideline for professional practices in Brazil, in 2005, Multidisciplinary Health Residencies courses were created according to Law 11.129. These programs are *lato sensu* post-graduate courses aimed at in-service education of health professionals that can work at strategic levels of attention (that is, mental health, primary care, cardiovascular, among others) and with different target populations – children and teenagers, families, adults and senior citizens (Brazil, 2005).

As could be observed from the brief explanation about the biopsychosocial model and some of its impacts for the professional education process and its impacts on the elaboration of health public policies, its advancements in comparison to the biomedical model are undeniable. The fact that it does not restrict the individual to the biological dimension allows not only an understanding closer to the totality of its constitution – explaining what is not biologically possible – but also the diversity and quality of health services, both uni- and multidisciplinary.

Pereira, Barros and Augusto (2011) emphasize how the biopsychosocial model contributed so that health care in Brazil became more humanized; this was implemented by the National Policy for Humanization in 2004. These authors argue that the aforementioned policy and the conception of care it expresses provide the understanding that subjectivity, in particular emotions and affections, are part of the health experiences and, as a consequence, that health professionals should take them into account. Pereira, Barros & Augusto (2011, p. 531) affirm that,

health care as advocated by the biopsychosocial paradigm involves the continuous reconstruction of meanings about oneself, of others and of the world, including meanings about health, illness, quality of life and autonomy, which calls for the necessary creation of a relational space that goes beyond the scientific/technological know-how. This allows looking at people beyond their illness, considering the knowledge they have about themselves, about sickening

¹ However, in 2020, the Ministry of Health published Technical Note 3, excluding mandatory training of these multidisciplinary centers. Local managers should define which and for how long the professionals who are not part of the *ESF* team can act (Brazil, 2020). This was one of the many changes in health policies implemented by the administration of President Jair Messias Bolsonaro, which has led to the weakening and destruction of the Unified Health System in Brazil.

processes and health as essential focuses on the joint reconstruction of meanings towards a healthy life in its various aspects.

The biopsychosocial model demonstrates that although the symptomatological descriptors of disorders are common, each individual feels and lives them in a unique way. This means that in addition to a multidisciplinary team, it is necessary for each professional to develop a relationship with the person under their care by means of quality listening. Therefore, it is necessary that professionals receive not only training, but also adequate working conditions.

This is one of the setbacks for the appropriate implementation of the biopsychosocial model or any other than the biomedical model. The lack of working conditions, in particular quality time to listen to the individual that is suffering or ill, and the lack of contact with another health professional to share evaluations about the medical cases is the reality of many professionals. This is a common situation for most professionals who work in public health contexts.

Some critical aspects in health care contexts include the lack of professionals to deal with the work demands, the pressure to achieve productivity goals, and the inadequate and/or insufficient physical and material infrastructure of working places. These aspects limit and often prevent professionals from breaking with the logic of biomedical care; instead they end up focusing on patients' symptoms and prescription of treatment, which is predominantly pharmacological.

Another limiting aspect is the lack of skills observed in health professionals in how to evaluate individuals in other ways except by means of standard protocols/tests/anamnesis or by means of laboratory tests. Despite the fact that training courses in the health area advocate the biopsychosocial model, future professionals receive little training on how to evaluate individuals without the use of instruments mentioned above. The same is observed in relation to the development of qualified listening, which in Brazil is part of the humanization policy (Santos, 2019). In mental health, it is rare to observe professionals, including psychologists, who use any kind of instrument other than the standardized ones to diagnose patients.

It is important to highlight that these instruments have a role in diagnostic processes, but should be used as indicators and not as the only form of diagnosis. This is because standardized instruments can identify, quantify and sometimes describe the behaviors that can be considered symptoms, but they cannot explain them or understand the process of their construction (Silva, 2022). Smith *et al* (2013) affirm that this limitation in doctors' education (the same possibly happens to other health professionals), occurs because medical education has not adapted to the biopsychosocial model as many professionals still argue about its scientificity. Among the various questions raised about the model's scientificity is the fact that it cannot be tested, as the model takes into consideration the individual's particularities concerning the disease (Smith *et al*, 2013). According to the authors, this is the reason many critics of the biopsychosocial model do not see it as a model, but as a theory or a pre-scientific or metapsychological theory or logic.

Another criticism of the biopsychosocial model pointed out by Smith *et al* (2013) refers to the fact that the generalized description that all aspects of health are biopsychosocial is not applicable in practice, therefore providing little orientation for professionals. The model also lacks specific methods to investigate what it proposes (Smith *et al*, 2013). Based on the identification of such criticism, the authors reaffirm what Engel (1977) already mentioned, that is, that the biopsychosocial model requires a patient centered-approach, and propose a set of essential questions to be asked concerning the three aspects that make up the model.

Smith *et al* (2013) present two tables containing descriptions of questions that should be asked of patients; they also highlight how doctors should act during an appointment (what aspects should be investigated, e.g. complaints, the history of complaints, their development, the physical, social and emotional aspects of complaints) as well as habits related to complaints. The authors also suggest that patients should be called by their names and that doctors should start appointments with informal conversations and demonstrate empathy towards patients. According to the authors, their proposal follows “6 criteria to ‘operationalism’ (i) logically consistent, (ii) specific in behavior terms, (iii) empirically based, (iv) technically feasible, (v) repeatable and, (vi) directed towards the creation of a concept that will function as a more predictable theory/model” (Smith *et al*, 2013, p. 268). This way the proposal could be considered a protocol.

The observation of these criteria allows us to understand how the working conditions of most health professionals make it difficult or even prevent them from acting in a way other than that based on the biomedical model. The weaknesses in the professional training and the conception of science based on a positivist epistemology that searches for reality by means of verification and measurement seem to limit the implementation of the biopsychosocial model or any other model that breaks with the logic of disease understood solely on biological aspects, and on doctor-centered care. This is observed in research and in professional practice.

In addition, it is important to mention the tendency to explain the psychic causes of illness in terms of biological aspects, either neurochemical alterations or genetics. It could be said that almost all disorders mentioned in the Diagnostic Manual of Mental Disorders (DSM), 5th edition (APA, 2014), present as the main hypothesized cause of disorders the biological components that can be manifested depending on social and psychological aspects. This tendency is observed since DSM-III, published in 1980, when American psychiatry assumed that the comprehension of mental disorders should be non-theoretical, based on the testability and verification principle, the criteria being descriptive and quantitative aspects (Russo & Venâncio, 2006). It seems that the second group of psychiatrists identified by Engel (1977) gained hegemony.

Starting with DSM- III, the biological conception, which is typical of the biomedical model, caused a meaningful increase in the number of disorders and this continues at every review of the manual. Therefore, the production of medicine to relieve the symptoms of “old” and “new” disorders also increases.

Russo and Venâncio (2006, p. 475) affirm that “in addition to the obvious economical interest this situation causes, it is necessary to consider that the set of new classifications produces and responds to a demand not only of medicine and relief but also of meaning.” From the propositions of Almeida and Gomes (2014), it is possible to say that the demands mentioned by Russo and Venâncio (2006) are concerned with epidemiological profiles that are increasingly expanding as a result of the productive restructuring of capitalism as well as the intensification of work.

This context creates in society a process called pathologization and medicalization, in which certain forms of dealing with the world are considered pathological and as the pathological conception is mainly biological, even according to the biopsychosocial discourse, medicalization is increasingly more implemented in the different aspects of life (Almeida & Gomes, 2014; Freitas & Amarante, 2015; Martinhago & Caponi, 2019). According to Almeida and Gomes (2014, p. 166-167),

it will be the role of medicine and health services to address these manifestations from the new reality of the world of work which are expressed as suffering and obstructions in individuals' lives and concrete collectivities. Health services will answer from a hegemonic scientific-epistemological paradigm that provides their structure, locating the focus and the cause of manifestations in individuals, translating them as organic disorders of the body and mind and trying to treat them.

In line with the propositions of the aforementioned authors about the predominance of biological aspects over others, the review by Moraes and Barroco (2016) about alcohol addiction indicates that, although most studies suggest multi-causal aspects, the emphasis is on the biological aspect, followed by the psychological and environmental aspects. The authors believe that, despite the multi-causal discourse based on a theory that places the biopsychosocial determinants as the causes of illness, the mono-causal view is still hegemonic.

Studies that emphasize the psychological aspects highlight personality characteristics, cognitive processes, unconsciousness, feelings, habits and behaviors as multi-causes of alcoholism (Barroco & Moraes, 2016). On the other hand, studies that emphasize environmental aspects such as work, family, gender, ethnicity, religion, income, among others as multi-causes of alcoholism, point out that family and work relations are preventive factors or risk to consumption, as the determination of disorders is in the biological or psychological dimensions. In other words, despite the fact that the biological, psychological and social aspects (understood as the environmental dimension) are considered the causes of addiction, the functions of each aspect are almost independent of one another.

In many investigations, the empirical mono-causal method is still privileged and it does not provide the understanding of the other determinations of disorders (Barroco & Moraes, 2016). This corroborates some criticism identified by Smith et al (2012) about the lack of scientificity in the biopsychosocial model. Barroco and Moraes (2016) conclude their study pointing out that,

based on this understanding, the etiology of alcoholism should be understood through the Historicity of the present moment, on the individual history in relation to the history of humanity, of human collectivity. Therefore, it is not enough to analyze only the organic aspects of the subject, their cognitive mechanisms, personality and their social and family relationships; it is necessary to try to understand, beyond the present and immediate manifestation alcoholism as a process, a synthesis constituted of the life history of individuals, that is connected to the history of human productions and the social relations derived from them. (Moraes & Barroco, 2016, p. 235).

Although the authors refer to studies about alcoholism, in which the biological aspects prevail, the social and psychological aspects also exert influence. The same applies to other disorders as can be observed in the descriptions of the DSM-V (APA, 2014).

Another evidence of this biopsychosocial conception that gives greater weight to the biological aspect is that the main therapeutic indication for disorders are pharmacological treatments. In addition, the conception of the biological, psychological and social aspects favors the emphasis either on one or another aspect; the conception of these aspects are seen as factors or variables that influence, but are not determiners of a unit, that is the individual. It is important to point out that such a conception of the biopsychosocial model is not only identified in Engel's followers, but in his own work. In the quotes by supporters of the biopsychosocial model presented in this article the words in bold demonstrate this.

Words such as factors, variables, and influences/to influence are recurrent in the texts of those who support the biopsychosocial model. Engel (1977) states that, "grief clearly exemplifies a situation in which psychological factors are primary; no preexisting chemical or physiological defects or agents need be invoked" (p. 388). On the same page the author highlights that "a biopsychosocial model would take **all of these factors into account**. It would acknowledge the fundamental fact that the patient comes to the physician because either he does not know what is wrong or, if he does, he feels incapable of helping himself" (p. 388).

In the same text, a few pages earlier, Engel (1977, p. 384) says that,

by obliging ourselves to think of patients with diabetes, a "somatic disease," and with schizophrenia, a "mental disease," in exactly the same terms, we will see more clearly how **inclusion of somatic and psychosocial factors is indispensable for both**; or more pointedly, how concentration on the biomedical and exclusion of the psychosocial distorts perspectives and even interferes with patient care.

Pereira, Barros and Augusto (2011) demonstrate that the biological, social and psychological dimensions are understood in a complementary form allowing the investigation of each one separately, as they are understood as variables.

1. The human body is a biological, psychological and social organism, that is, it receives information, organizes, stores, generates and gives meaning and transmits

them, which in turn produce forms of how to behave; 2. Health and illness are conditions in a dynamic balance; they are co-determined by **biological, psychological and social variables, all of them in constant interaction**; 3. The study, diagnosis, prevention and treatment of various illnesses should consider the special and differentiated contributions of **the three sets of variables mentioned**; (...) (Pereira, Barros & Augusto, 2011, p. 526, our emphasis).

In doing so, this model ends up fragmenting the individual in an attempt to put the parts together, even though the word holistic – that reveals the aim of trying to understand health in an integral form – understands that the whole is not the sum of its parts.

The discussion above shows that the advances the biopsychosocial model brought to the understanding of health and the interventions related to it are undeniable. On the other hand, it is a fact that the real working conditions of health professionals aligned to public policies and/or the career plan that considers as references meritocracy and productivity, complicate the implementation of the model, in addition to professional education opportunities that do not contribute to the understanding of the biopsychosocial model. However, it is understood that even if such aspects are overcome, there is a limit placed by the biopsychosocial model itself, which is the fragmented comprehension of biological, psychological and social aspects, seen as factors or variables that interfere with or may influence the predominance of one over the other.

The biomedical model has not been overcome; on the contrary, it is the hegemonic model, especially in mental health. The biological aspects are protagonists, whereas the social and psychological aspects have supporting roles. In addition, this does not refer only to a conception of mental health, but of the individual that is explained as a set of neurochemical (re)arrangements or genetic predispositions, reducing the whole complexity of what the human being is.

In order to overcome the fragmentation, it is necessary to have a theory that understands the biological, social and psychological aspects as units that constitute a totality; aspects that have an interdependent relationship. It is understood that the Historical-Cultural Psychology has a clear conception that does not fragment the individual understood as a synthesis of multiple determinations.

From the fragmentation to the totality of the individual

The theoretical foundation of Cultural-Historical Psychology is the comprehension that the psychic develops from biological, social and cultural aspects in a dialectical relationship. The individual is born with a set of biological characteristics that change throughout the individual's social and historical development (Vigotski, 1995, 1996, 1997a, 1997b, 2018, Leontiev, 1978, 1988). To Vigotski (1997a; 1997b; 2018), development is not a linear succession of events temporarily determined by the biological development of the organism, but a complex form not in parallel with the individual's age; it

matches the environment conditions that intertwine with the individual's biological possibilities.

Such transformation is only possible through the mediation of activity and language. Activity is understood as “(...) a life unit mediated by psychological reflex whose function is to guide the individual in the objective world” (Leontiev, 1978, p. 66-7). In the initial stages of development, activities are simple, the motives that drive them match the activities' purposes; later-on activities are more complex because the breadth of mediations that constitute the activities and the psychic possibilities of the individual are also more elaborate. Language plays an important role in the transformation of activities at the same time that it allows radical changes in the psyche. This is because language is a set of codes that name objects, situations, feelings that allow human not only to communicate, but also deal with objects that are not present, that is, language allows men to abstract and generalize; two central characteristics of thought (Luria, 1979). Activity and language as mediators enable the individual to develop the process that goes from clumsiness to expertise, from involuntary behaviors to mainly voluntary behaviors, which allow the individual to master their own conduct. This form of behavior is possible because the psychic processes have a dimension that Vigotsky calls superior; the processes develop through the internalization of the cultural dimensions that constitute the reality in which the individual is inserted. That is, what is inter-psychological through the mediation of activity and language becomes intra-psychological, that constitutes the psychic and allows the individuals to guide themselves in the world in a planned and intentional form (Vigotski, 1997a).

The transformation from inter-psychological to intra-psychological changes the peculiarities of the whole psyche, allowing that determined functions psychic characterized by the involuntary and biological aspect acquire new possibilities of functioning and expression, in a superior perspective in comparison to the previous form.

This does not mean that the involuntary dimensions cease to exist; it means they are incorporated in an overcoming movement by the new voluntary possibilities, which are more complex and become more predominant as the individual develops.

Another important aspect in Cultural-Historic Psychology about the comprehension of the psychic refers to the relationship between the psychic functions. Vigotski (1997a, 2018) states that in the historic development of the individual changes do not necessarily occur in the psychic function or in its structure, but in the relationship between the different functions that did not exist in the previous phases of development. Vigotski states that “... from one level to another, the essential difference was not often observed in the intrafunctional change, but in the interfunctional alterations, in the interfunctional nexuses, in the interfunctional structure” (Vygotski, 1997a, p. 72-73). It is precisely these new inter-functional nexuses that constitute the psychological system. Understanding the development of the psychic from the psychological system implies not only the study of a process or function in isolation, as they are determinants as well as determining others.

The acquisition and development of language, as stated earlier, causes a qualitatively superior change in the psyche, allowing the individual to control their behavior gradually. However, the form as well as the activity that affect the transformations of each psychic function is different, keeping in mind the specificities of each of them as well as the individual and the activities they develop. Therefore, evaluating the development and the health-illness process does not imply quantifying what is present and what is not, but analyzing its peculiarities as well. The complexity of the development and health-illness processes calls for an evaluation method that takes into consideration the contradictory movement of human beings.

To Vigotski (2018), the evaluation/diagnosis method of development, whether regular or in the process of suffering and illness, should start in the decomposition into units and not in the decomposition of the whole into elements, as the fragmentation of isolated parts does not contain in itself the human being in its totality. Analysis by means of decomposition into elements is descriptive and reduced to the identification of symptoms that do not explain how they appeared, which is essential for an adequate diagnosis and intervention. The decomposition into elements means decomposing a phenomenon into parts, in which the study is isolated or carried out in a multilateral way; later-on the elements are put together to have an idea of the whole, understood as the sum of the parts. Vigotski (2018) exemplifies this process using studies about speech that can be done considering the physiological and or anatomical aspects of speech organs and the psychic dimension. In doing so, Vigotski (2018, p. 39) affirms that "(...) we would act like a chemist decomposing water into the elements that constitute it. We would take each aspect of speech as an independent element and study each one in isolation."

The study of speech by means of the decomposition of its elements implies the biological aspects that allow the production of sound, the sound dimension of speech (letters and words) and the characteristics of transmission of meaning. However, to Vigotski (2018) this form of decomposition does not show speech, but fragments of it, as in the example of the study of water, that fragments its chemical composition, it is not water any more, but oxygen and hydrogen in isolation. Vigotski (2018) affirms that the analysis that the child will develop language, if the environment in which they are inserted has a broad and elaborate vocabulary and/or if they have good memory and are intelligent, does not explain how language is developed. The explanation is in the relationship between child and environment; if they like to speak or not, how they react to language mistakes and how the context deals with such situations.

A water molecule is the smallest unit of water decomposition that reveals its totality, even in a primary form. The same refers to speech; it is necessary to find the smallest unit that reveals its totality, which to Vigotski (2018) is the meaningful sound that depends on the characteristics of the transmission of a meaning, of the biological aspects that allow the emission of sound and the sound dimension of speech.

To Vigotski (2018) the decomposition into units is what allows understanding the process in its totality. To the author, the need to analyze by

means of decomposition into units “... *is defined by the fact that it is part of a whole that contains, even in an embryonic form, all the essential characteristics of the whole*” (Vigotski, 2018, p. 40, emphasis in the original).

Vigostki (2018) proceeds the analysis about the importance of contextualized decomposition into units using the speech example, affirming that,

consequently, it is observed again that the unit is crucial, not the elements. That is, the relationship between the environment and the characteristics of the child himself. If we find this unit, it will preserve in itself what is characteristic of the development of speech as a whole - the relationship between the environment and the personal moments. In other words, what is rooted in the specificities of the child himself (Vygotsky, 2018, p. 47, emphasis in the original).

This way, when studying any process, it is necessary to consider decomposition into units. It is not enough to affirm that the individual and their process of development, both regular process and the suffering condition and/or illness, there are biological, psychological and social elements/variables. Vigotski (2018) highlights that no one denies that the biological and environment are determinants of development and illness. Therefore, to affirm that the individual and the process of illness have these two sources, does not reveal their specificities. In Vigotski's words (2018, p. 72, emphasis in the original)

(...) the heredity component plays a role in development; however small its specific weight is in the concrete case. The role of this component is never reduced to absolute zero and, likewise, the divergence is never equal to 100. It means that an aspect that develops is never determined only as a purely hereditary characteristic - the environment also participates in the development. Therefore, development always contains, in a unit, hereditary and environmental aspects. True, this unit is varied. We have seen that the role and specific weight of hereditary influences may be greater in relation to some functions than in relation to others, and less at one age than at another. Consequently, **this unit is mutable.**

It is understood that the biopsychological model studies mental disorders by decomposing them into elements, namely the biological, psychological and social aspects, in a multilateral perspective. This statement is possible because these elements are considered factors, elements or variables, as mentioned in the previous section. Consequently, they are understood in isolation in the constitution of the disorder and of the individual. The understanding by factors leads to the description of symptoms or at the most of processes, but not the explanation, as for this it is necessary to understand the inseparable relation of biological, social and psychological aspects, which mutually determine and transform each other, which the biopsychosocial model cannot do. The decomposition into elements see the biological elements as the cause of mental disorders, even if determined by genetic predisposition. In relation to the psychic, on the other hand, the specificities of the cognitive processes, personality and

feelings, the environment as well as the social relations favor or not the development of illness, as indicated in the studies of Barroco and Moraes (2016). In current neuroscience, the brain has a central role and it is understood as the origin/source of the psyche. Thus, it is in the brain that all pathology explanations are found, as a neurochemical (im)balance.

Cultural-historic psychology posits that the brain plays a central role in the constitution and functioning of the human psyche. Nevertheless, the origin of the psyche should not be sought in the brain, but in the set of social relations of the individual. Psychological aspects such as cognition, personality, emotions and feelings, generally understood as independent processes and separate from the biological dimension, are a consequence of a brain and neurochemical organization. Emotion, for example, is an internal regulating sign of behavior, a temporary sensation that reflects a relation lived by the individual (Petrovski *et al*, 1989). Maybe the emotional state can explain it better. For example, joy, “a positive emotional state related to the possibility of fully satisfying a current need [...]” (Petrovski *et al*, p. 380), or fear related to the real or imaginary possibility of the individual to suffer some form of damage, are either material or related to the individual’s well-being. Thus, fear is considered a negative emotional state.

Although emotional states can be physiologically experienced in a very intense form (tachycardia, tremors, dry throat, etc.), these states gain a qualitatively higher dimension throughout the individual’s development. These states change from involuntary to states intentionally controlled by the individual and predominant in their performance in the world. A person who becomes too stressed out with someone who committed an infraction or a mistake, for example, a mistake that was not so serious to justify such a dramatic reaction, may feel anxious and regretful. This emotional state of anguish and regret is in fact an internal physiological sign related to the individual’s attitude that may lead the person to apologize or treat the other person more cordially (the sign regulated the behavior of the person who was stressed out (Petrovski *et al*, 1989). The stable relationship established with a person or with an object mediated by emotions may change into feelings. Feelings are constituted of emotions in a way that reflect the individual’s attitude towards the object of a stable need. Unlike emotions that have innate roots, but that are historically and socially transformed, feelings are necessarily historical and ontogenetic, because they reflect the individual’s way of living by means of norms, values and demands. The state of anger that a person may feel after a diagnosis may become a feeling of hate and last for months or years. An emotional state that may be experienced every time the person meets the person who delivered the diagnosis; when they remember the situation or when they feel certain symptoms.

This way, the various forms that feelings and emotions can be experienced by the individual have a regulating and intentional behavior function, which improves throughout the individual’s development. This why Vygotski (1996, p. 299) affirms that,

affective impulses are present in each new stage of the child's development, from the lowest to the highest. Affection initiates the process of the child's psychic development, the formation of his personality, and ends this process, thus

culminating the entire development of the personality. [...] affection is the alpha and the omega, the first and the last elaboration, the prologue and epilogue of all psychic development.

In addition to the regulatory function of behavior, emotions are important dimensions in the development of higher psychological processes. What characterizes psychological processes is the possibility the individual has of controlling them in an intentional and mediated way. In the memorization process, for example, the individual does not store everything they experience, but only those contents or aspects that have been somehow meaningful in that particular experience. This is possible because of brain structure and organization.

Based on the above explanation, it is possible to understand that all psychic processes, despite being different in terms of genetics and functioning, as well as emotions, maintain an interdependent relationship in order to develop and to constitute the psychic reflex, in which the external reality is internally recreated in the psyche.

This recreation is not a mere imposition from the external to the internal plan, but a re-signification of what has been appropriated, that is, it is recreated according to the historical and socially shared meanings about a specific situation, that has a particular meaning for the individual (Leontiev, 1978). The personal sense is a form of meaning with the same genetic root, but it represents reality in a unique way (Vigotski (2001), affections are central in this process. Vigotski (2004, p. 126) states that,

the way of thinking, along with the system of concepts imposed on us by the environment also includes our feelings. We do not simply feel: we perceive feelings in the form of jealousy, anger, outrage, and offense. If we say we despise someone, the fact of naming the feeling causes them to vary, as they maintain a certain relationship with our thoughts. [...] Just as it is impossible to distinguish where superficial perception ends and where understanding begins in relation to a given object. In perception, the structural particularities of the visual field and understanding are synthesized. The same happens at the affective level as we never experience jealousy in a pure way as we are conscious of its conceptual connections.

In another text the same author affirms

the connection between **intellect and affect**. Among the most basic defects of traditional approaches to the study of psychology has been the isolation of the intellectual from the volitional and affective aspects of consciousness. The inevitable consequence of the isolation of these functions has been the transformation of thinking into an autonomous stream. Thinking itself became the thinker of thoughts. Thinking was divorced from the full vitality of life, from the motives, interests, and inclinations of the thinking individual. Thinking was transformed either into a useless epiphenomenon, a process that can change nothing in the individual's life and behavior, or into an independent and

autonomous primeval force that influences the life of consciousness and the life of the personality through its intervention. (Vygotsky, 2001, p. 24-25, our emphasis)

There is no doubt about Vigotski's criticism of the dichotomous forms in understanding cognition and affection, that is unfortunately still present in psychology and in the health area even after a century (the passage above was originally published in 1934).

As has been said, the biopsychological model comprehends its three dimensions in a separate way, therefore expanding the fragmentation of the individual and of the health illness process. Some of the political implications of this fragmentation is the fact that it does not see the existing model of society as structurally sickening; a model that imposes situations that cause suffering, with the expansion of epidemiological profiles as highlighted by Almeida and Gomes (2014) and the normalization of pathology as discussed by Ratner (2019). According to this author,

the idealized and conventional medical model no longer reflects the social, psychological and biological reality as in the past. It should be understood that the current conventional medical model works as an ideological tool that promotes an idealized conception of society, biology, psychology and ordinary treatments. The conventional medical model legitimizes society by ignoring its pathologies. This model exacerbates its pathology by ignoring it and by trying to incorporate people into it rather than transform it (Ratner, 2019, p. 287).

It is understood that both the biomedical and biopsychological model fragment the individual and the health illness process into factors. To overcome this fragmentation, in addition to analysis by unit, another important aspect of the method used to investigate development is the comparative genetic character. It is genetically related to the genesis of the processes, which cannot be known from the symptoms. It is comparative because it evaluates the development of the individual with themselves, in different stages and in shorter intervals of time and allows evaluating what has been developed (Vigotski, 1997b), highlighting that comparison implies observation of equalities and differences of what has been analyzed. Thus, it is possible to say that the tests and inventories quantify the symptoms, in addition to identifying them, but they do not evaluate the development of processes or psychic functions in situations of illness. An evaluation of this form implies identifying symptoms and describing them, but these have to be understood as indicators of the development that should be evaluated according to the method proposed by Vigotski.

Vigotski (2018) argues that symptoms reveal what is common and recurrent in the disease process and not the particularities of its expression in each unique individual. Therefore, it is not enough to quantify them; it is necessary to know their qualitative processes, as well as to identify and evaluate qualitatively what still is undamaged despite the illness process. In summary, it is necessary to explain the reality beyond its description by trying to analyze not only the product, but also the formative processes.

Still considering the symptoms, it is important to treat them as expressions of how the individual appropriates the world based on values and current social norms. When analyzing psychosis, Ratner (1995, p. 229) points out that “(...) the great ideas about the capacity of the self, only slightly exaggerates the individualist, ambitious, competitive, cruel, anti-social, opportunistic and materialistic ethics which is the foundation of western society.” Based on this understanding, Ratner summarizes that “(...) symptoms are not arbitrary expressions of psychological disorders. They have their roots on values, beliefs, auto-definition, emotions and motives. The whole experience with illnesses is filled with cultural meanings and expresses the social character of conscience (Ratner, 1995, p. 234).²

Rubinstein (1999) agrees with Vigotski's understanding of symptoms and affirms that,

many psychopathological phenomena occur when a patient gets in touch with demands of the surrounding reality, with its effects. Consequently, the determining cause of each symptom can be very different, not specified, not pre-determined by the brain lesion itself (...) (Rubinstein, 1999, p. 17).

Considering what has been said about symptoms, only an understanding of the individual in their totality that should be investigated by the decomposition into units and not into elements, as established by the biopsychosocial model, provides such understanding. The construction of the illness process, even the one caused by biological aspects, has its social and psychological determinations in an inseparable form. The brief presentation of the understanding of Cultural-Historic Psychology about the development of emotions, feelings and symptoms reveals the dialectical relationship between the psychic processes that form the psychological system, which in turn is constituted by the unity of the biological, psychological and social.

Final considerations

Health professionals, especially psychologists who work directly in the field, should be aware of the current conceptions of the area, in particular when they support various political strategies. In this case, the biopsychological model guides numerous health public policies in various countries, including Brazil. In the scientific field, it is not different, in the diverse areas that constitute health.

In addition, in almost all training courses for health professionals, psychology is part of the curriculum aiming to help the future professional to understand specific stages of human development and some psychological processes (in their regular expression or in the process of disease) for the development of intervention practices, taking into consideration the professional specificity. In this case, psychologists who work in these training courses need to

² It is relevant to observe that this proposition about symptom is consistent with the proposition of symptom by Luria, as mentioned in many studies. For example, Luria (1981).

be involved in the discussions of the health area in general and of the professional specificities taught in the course in order to contribute to the training process, whether corroborating the current conceptions or presenting their weaknesses.

The biopsychological model explains health based on the conception of what the individual is, including biological, psychological and social aspects, in addition to the health and disease conditions that should be analyzed considering these three aspects, as argued by several authors presented in this article. However, despite the intention of this model to understand the individual and health in a comprehensive way, the biological, social and psychological dimensions are understood in a complementary way; this allows the investigation of each one separately, understood as variables. Thereby, this model fragments the individual by trying to sum the parts, even though the word holistic (or integral), which is often used by advocates of this model, understand that the whole is not the sum of the parts.

Another aspect that reveals this fragmentation, which is the result of understanding the biological, social and psychological dimensions as factors, is the fact that there is always the predominance of one dimension in the explanations about the individual's condition, the biological being the most used. This happens in explanations in mental health that have genetics and/or neural constitution as the main causes of disorders. The social aspects facilitate or promote something already present in the individual and determined by biological aspects.

It is imperative to consider and understand advances in neurosciences about the organization and brain functioning in general, as well as the processes of suffering and illness. However, the way the brain is organized also suffers psychological and social determinations that are expressed in the same phenomenon, as we tried to demonstrate with some propositions of Cultural-Historic Psychology. Thus, it is understood that only a comprehension of the individual in their totality, as well as a method of investigation (research or clinical) will provide the understanding of the process of health illness in the same way, without fragmenting their constitutive aspects, or the individual.

It is common knowledge that theoretical, experimental and other types of studies about the contributions of Cultural-Historic Psychology for the health area need to advance, in particular in relation to intervention in processes of suffering and psychic illness. In Brazil, this task has been faced successfully by many psychologists that work in the health area and by researchers, especially with their master's theses and doctoral dissertations, even though there not have been many so far.

As presented in this article, it is not enough to theorize that the individual and the illness process are constituted of biological, psychological and social aspects; it is necessary to understand how they are organized and determined inseparably. Symptoms, especially those related to psychic disorders, are social constructions based on culturally established meanings, conscious or unconsciously, considering the individual characteristics as well as those of a particular social group. Therefore, if illness is a construction, its overcoming is

also a collective construction and collective strategies should be constructed. Maybe this is the biggest challenge of the present time, in which individualism and competitiveness by means of meritocracy are intensified. These are some of the many aspects that hold up possibilities of collective actions. Collective actions should have a clear direction in relation to what kind of individuals and society are aimed for; that is why psychology is also political. Overcoming the fragmentation of the understanding of the individual and the illness processes to an understanding of totality is based on the understanding of the need of theories and practices that actually promote human emancipation and not the adaptation of the individual in a sick and sickening society.

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Psychotherapy with children in the context of justice: A social space for education, learning and subjective development

Vannúzia Leal A. Peres

Abstract

The way psychotherapy with children constitutes a social space for education, learning and subjective development has been discussed from the perspective of the theory of subjectivity in commitment to the generating capacity of individuals. Continuously immersed in this space, I have been building theoretical models explaining the uniqueness of this development process – especially the development of children whose parents dispute their custody in court. The interpretative constructions of these children's actions and relationships with their parents take place in individual and joint therapeutic sessions, enlivened by multiple ludic scenarios, without any previous theme or methodological coercion. While engaging in these sessions with the children and their parents, we dialogue about their experiences and provoke their unfolding in dramatic scenes and actions or the experience of the “as if” game with spontaneity and creativity, to the point of recreating them with their fantasies and imagination. During this constructive-interpretive process of dialogic character, engaging in this social space with their subjective productions and without suppressing their contradictions related to the conflicts of their parents, children learn how to create and recreate their relationships in the family and beyond, indicating that there is subjective development or qualitative changes in their subjective organization. The result of such experiences suggests that psychotherapy favors the original process of constituting subjective configurations compatible with the emergence of the agent or the subject to subvert the instituted order in favor of the development of society. Therefore, psychotherapy with children is representative of the political aspect of the theory of subjectivity or it is a resource for the process of subjective development of children in which the individual and the social are contradictory and recursively interrelated.

Keywords

psychotherapy with children, education and learning, subjective development, politics in psychology

Introduction

I really wish to share some of my ideas on the value of psychotherapy with children in the process of human development. I have immersed myself in this field since 1977, first, from the perspective of Jacob Levy Moreno (1889-1974), the creator of sociometry, the theory of social relations, and recently, based on the cultural-historical theory of subjectivity¹, developed by Fernando Luis González Rey (1949- 2019).

Initially, inspired by the thoughts of Levy Moreno (1997) on human relationships, I integrated psychodiagnosis and intervention, in practice, involving both the family and the child in joint therapeutic sessions, in which the child demonstrates to be active in their development process (Peres, 1983).

Later, guided by the theory of subjectivity, I understood that the child is active in this process by generating “subjective sense”² of communication and emotional climate in their family relations and outside of it (Peres, 2012).

I am aware that family is the “social placenta” for children, in which they learn to play social roles, that is, where they begin their development process, whose key factor, according to Levy Moreno (1997), is the emerging spontaneity in an “open universe”, in which they can move and make a stand in relation to other people who also surround them.

I agree when Levy Moreno (1997, p. 99) states that the infants are “pure spontaneity”, “potential geniuses”, that they “[...] warm up and sustain themselves from the moment of their birth”. For the author, spontaneity arises when the infant freely comes up with a need to act. However, standing by the philosophy of the encounter by the humanist Martin Buber (1977), the author affirms that the infant depends on the state of spontaneity of others such as the therapist.

Based on the theory of subjectivity by González Rey (1997, 2003, 2004, 2005, 2007) I believe that spontaneity is a subjective resource³ produced by children themselves and it emerges in their relationships with others, enhancing their capacity to creatively act. For psychotherapy, a universe open to the emergence of spontaneity, the therapist is the significant other to the children, from whom they are detached and position themselves creatively in relation to their families and other social spaces.

For González Rey (2004), the children can generate subjective senses in relation to their significant others and these senses may be the source of their development.

I think that these subjective senses involve spontaneity which emerges while enhancing the children's capacity to act freely and creatively express their affective needs, conflicts and suffering. It is worth mentioning that the children's

¹ “The Theory of Subjectivity, from the cultural-historical perspective, is a way of understanding the specificity of human processes in the conditions of culture”. (Mitjáns Martínez & González Rey, 2019, p. 15).

² “Subjective sense” is the processual unit of the symbolic and the emotional that emerges in every human experience [...]” (González Rey, 2002, p. 31).

³ Goulart and González Rey (2019, p. 268) exemplify how the subjective resource “is generated in a therapeutic process” of a group that “generates new positions and forms of communication” [...].

spontaneity emerges from their emotionality and fantasies in the ongoing therapeutic process, a process that involves the therapist's actions and the interactions between them.

In Levy Moreno (1997), the children's spontaneity and creativity, imagination and fantasies in relation to the experience, represent the development of psychodramatic roles, the roles of the “psyche”. From my point of view and in accordance to the theory of subjectivity by González Rey, these roles are integrated in their process of subjective development⁴, favoring or not their emergence as agents or subjects⁵ of the social process.

Levy Moreno (1997) states that roles are the smallest “cultural unit of conduct” which allow us to understand the quality of human relationships and they can be continuously developed. The idea that the individuals (actors) can break with the social role, move freely to transform themselves and the society, suggests some proximity to the theory of subjectivity by González Rey (2003), regarding the categories of agent and subject.

It is noteworthy presenting the thought of Morin (2003a, pp. 131-132) on the “psycho-sociology of social roles” and how it evidenced the social crystallization of the roles experienced personally, “a ritual of characters in everyday life” [...] “ambassadors of the self in relation to the other, but also images of the self in relation to itself”.

Thus, I think that the value of Levy Moreno's theory of roles (1997), as elements of the “formation of the self”, comes from his idea of subjectivity, interrelated to spontaneity and creativity. It is important for the author to understand that the individual can break with the “cultural conserve” (norms and values of the institutions) and develop psychodramatic roles, the roles of emotionality and fantasies about the experience, representing an idea of subjectivity that integrates the social, individual and psychodramatic contexts into the action.

Calvente (2002), an Argentine psychodramatist, concludes that Levy Moreno failed to explain how the affective learning of roles occurs in the first universe of the identity matrix, which is “the origin and nourishment of subjectivity”.

I understand that Levy Moreno failed to develop his definition of subjectivity, especially on childhood. Even having stated that children are capable of reversing roles and understanding others in their singularity, he does not explain how they develop a “certain degree of initiative” in their actions and address bonds or relationships with different quality.

Therefore, the idea that childhood is a special moment in life, which can brighten the individual's subjective development process can not be ignored. I know that in psychotherapy the children position themselves by expressing their

⁴ “Subjective development is a singular and non-predictable process that implies emergence of individuals and social groups as subjects and, therefore, the development of new subjective resources that impact different spheres of their lives” (Goulart & González Rey, 2019, p. 263).

⁵ The agent would be the individual – or social group – located in the course of events in the current field of their experiences. The subject represents the capacity of individuals and groups to position themselves, whose limits are in the very symbolic production of culture and in the subjective resources to assume the challenges of the existential spaces of experience (González Rey & Mitjans Martínez, 2017, p. 73).

needs and affective motivations more confidently, and that this requires them to generate new subjective senses regarding their relational experiences. The way children experience these relationships in the first universe of their development processes, a universe that Levy Moreno called the “social placenta” or, in other words, the emotional climate of relationships in the family “where everything begins” is yet to be clarified.

As previously mentioned, the family is involved in the children's therapeutic process, in their learning about themselves, on how to relate to differences, with the game rules and also the unexpected. I delve into the study of this learning that is a source of subjective development. Therapeutic sessions are an opportunity for children to demonstrate their ability to act with spontaneity and creativity. In that sense, I remind that children engage in the game and in the dramatic action that are “emotional initiators” or “inductors” of the dialogue about their conflicts, which tell us a lot about their emotionality and subjective development.

From González Rey's theory of subjectivity, I observe that the performance of roles, which are both individual and collective, integrates the unique processes of children's subjective development. These processes are complexly inseparable from their families' processes of subjective development. Everything points to the fact that the children and their families are also, simultaneously and recursively, involved in the processes of subjective development of the society they live in (Peres, 2012, 2014, 2022).

With the theory of subjectivity, I seek to broaden the knowledge on the dynamic and recursive interrelation among the subjective development of children, the subjective development of the family and the subjective development of the society. Immersed in the field of psychotherapy with children, understanding that there is no direct and linear relationship in the development of these systems (the child, the family and the society) has been quite challenging. So, I try to explain how children and their families, with their subjective specificities, are mutually and recursively constituted in a cultural-historical process; how these interrelated systems simultaneously constitute the individual and social subjectivity of the therapeutic space, a subjectivity that, according to Mitjáns Martínez and González Rey has a “significant force” in the expression of the actions of individuals (Mitjáns Martínez & González Rey, 2019, p. 15).

González Rey (2004) believes that the source of the complex development process is the individual with his subjectivity in relation to his experience in different complexly interrelated social spaces.

As far as I'm concerned, the author means that the subjective development of the individual is a complex process of organization and qualitative reorganization of “a complex network of subjective configurations” generated by him in the course of his history. This history is constantly updated, from birth to death, through his continuous subjective productions in relation to their experiences in different social spaces (González Rey, 2003).

The author means that the subjectivity produced by the individual in relation to what he has experienced, at any moment of his life, in different social

spaces, enables him to continually reorganize himself and achieve a new “formation” that does not depend on any universal or that this process is singular, that is, it is not subject to categories *a priori*.

Considering all this, I present a brief discussion about the value of psychotherapy with children for the processes of subjective development of individuals and society, simultaneously. My intention is to highlight the unique processes of development of the agent and the subject, subjective conditions that represent, among other categories, the political aspect of the theory of subjectivity.

Psychotherapy with children as a social space for education, learning and subjective development

The idea behind psychotherapy sessions with children, a social space for education and learning as a subjective production, of complexly interrelated dimensions, is free of linearity. The therapeutic process in childhood, a sensitive moment in life, is favorable to the subjective development of the individual. In this process, without being immediately aware, children learn to take action in the creation and recreation of the social space of their relationships. If past and future are inseparable, as stated by González Rey (2007), I have no doubt that the children's subjective development favors the emergence of the agent or the subject at any other moment in their lives.

Immersively working with children, I have built theoretical models that explain the uniqueness of their development processes, especially the development of children whose parents dispute their custody in court. The interpretative constructions of these children's actions and relationships with their parents take place in individual and joint therapeutic sessions, enlivened by multiple ludic scenarios, without any previous theme or methodological coercion. Engaged in these sessions, in the dialogue about their experiences, the children are provoked to unfold them in dramatic scenes and actions or to experience them in the “as if” play, with spontaneity and creativity, to the point of recreating them with their fantasies and imagination.

In this process, antagonistic subjective senses emerge, generated by children in relation to communication with their families, conflicting subjective senses, dynamically and recursively implied with the disorder in this system. It is possible that they emerge as an expression of their processes of subjective development, of their singularities, which, as stated by Morin (2003b), carry “the entire form of the human condition”. Morin (2003b) assumes that the expression of emotions, at this moment in life, can mean the universality of the “affective unit” of human beings, the cultural sense of intersubjectivity and communication.

Considering the theory of subjectivity, I suppose that at this moment, subjectively configured emotions guide the children's actions and may emerge at any other moment in life. In the study of multiple singular cases, I recognize that there is an unlimited diversity in the quality of the expression of emotions, depending, during the ongoing dialogue, on the subjective implications of the

children and the therapist (González Rey & Mitjáns Martínez, 2017). So, in addition to what Morin (2003b) states, I would say that the quality of expression of children's emotions in psychotherapy depends on the subjective senses that they generate in relation to communication with their families and that these subjective senses carry the social subjectivity and the subjectivity of the entire humanity, its antagonisms and contradictions.

In psychotherapy with children, I seek to interpret these subjective senses and how they enable the development of agent and subject conditions. That implies making them understand how they are located at the center of the world and occupy their spaces in the systems in which they are living and developing themselves with creative actions. How does this happen? I understand that they learn to experience themselves as agents or as subjects of these spaces, including and distinguishing themselves from other characters in the “as if” play. Through action and interaction with these other characters, imaginary or not, they can, at the same time, experience opposing affective forces and recreate them with spontaneity.

The children's action in the “as if” play and outside of it can motivate new subjective senses in relation to what has been experienced; the development of their subject condition, ensuring the quality of the relationship with themselves and the quality of the relationship with the other. In the action, children can update themselves in relation to the significant other, in relation to the mothers, for example, and take a stand for them in the face of an unfair accusation, as this child did: “I like you [...] you lied and that's what I don't like”. This qualitative moment took place in the joint session, a space for reflection in the midst of the “as if” play, in which the child and the mother engaged in an authentic dialogue about themselves, defining themselves. With their fantasies and imagination, they created in the “as if” play and outside of it new ways of living together in their daily lives which were more pleasant and committed.

That child taught us that taking a stand in relation to the other does not mean excluding, nullifying, or annulling oneself, but differentiating oneself. It means learning to live dialogically, which, in theory, favored the development of the quality of her subjective organization and differentiated her from her mother. Motivated by this action, it is likely that she has generated new subjective senses in relation to the litigation and a subjective configuration⁶ favorable to the development of the subject condition of their family as a social space. It is likely that the child has emerged as a subject in this specific circumstance by “subverting an established order”, favoring the development of her family and indirectly the development of society.

Just like this one, our other interpretative constructions of singular cases seek to make the subjective senses that guide the child's actions in the family and in other social spaces, such as school, intelligible. These constructions guide the actions we use to tension the therapeutic dialogues in which the subjective senses

⁶ “The subjective configuration is a self-generating formation that arises from the diverse flow of subjective senses, producing, from its generating character, converging groups of subjective senses that are expressed in the most stable subjective states of individuals in the course of an experience”. (González Rey & Mitjáns Martínez, 2017, p. 63).

are generated by the children in relation to what is experienced in the family. In this complex process, subjective senses of multiple experiences emerge, which can be reorganized.

By engaging in psychotherapy without suppressing their contradictions in relation to their parents' conflicts, children develop the ability to create and recreate their relationships in the family and outside of it, suggesting that there is subjective development. The result of these experiences suggests that psychotherapy favors the original process of constituting subjective configurations favorable to the emergence of the agent and the subject. So, I can say that psychotherapy with children is representative of the political aspect of the theory of subjectivity or that it is a resource for the process of subjective development of individuals suggesting, as I see it, a permanent reorganization of antagonistic and conflicting subjective senses.

My curiosity is about how antagonistic and conflicting subjective senses are permanently reorganized in the course of life, which leads me to reach for the principle of complexity - disorder - as thought by Morin (2003c). This author teaches us that permanent reorganization enables human beings to be original and singular.

As yet, I understand how subjective development is an original and unique process. For González Rey (2004), it is involved with the subjective senses that individuals generate in relation to multiple social and cultural experiences, in different contexts. Although he does not deny the place of the other in this process, González Rey (2004) emphasizes "the active and specific place of one's self-organization processes in the initial stages of development and their permanent presence as the subject of their interrelationships" (González Rey, 2004, p. 3). His criticism about the emphasis given by other theories to the place of the other in human development makes sense for psychotherapy with children from the perspective of subjectivity which, as we propose, includes spontaneity as a resource generated by children which enhances their creativity. I understand that this resource emerges in the therapeutic process, from the children themselves, from their emotionality in relation to the other.

González Rey (2004, p. 4) states that "human relationships are organized, from a very early age, as a system in which emotional expressions play a very important role, including the most important one for a newborn". So, it implies that emotion has a central place in subjective development processes. In accordance with González Rey's thinking, I try to understand children's subjective development from their emotions as affections initially produced in the communicative process and in their relationships with his family (Peres, 2001, 2012, 2013).

González Rey (2004) discusses how children generate subjective senses in the communicative process in the family and produces complex emotions that define the quality of their relationships in this space. Meanwhile, he points out that development is a process of qualitative change in the subjective organization of the individual and that it implies a variety of emotions. For the author, in this process, the individual's tensions and actions, always involved with their subjective productions, guarantee the development of their subject condition.

In the therapeutic process, I focus on the subjective senses that children generate from the communication in the family. During the “as if” play, I provoke them not to lose sight of their freedom to dialogue and to transit spontaneously between the experienced and the imagined, or to express themselves about their fantasies to their parents who embody different characters in this game. The make-believe play, the “as if” play, is a symbolic space in which the children experience reality and fiction, learn about themselves and about the other in a dialogic constructive-interpretative process. As in children's psychodrama, this takes place without a prior and delimited stage, without any regularity or pattern. Playing make-believe or “as if” encourages children to explore their possibilities of dialogic communication and creative actions, in the course of which they can generate new subjective senses in relation to their experiences.

Since nothing is previously organized, at that moment, the children experience their histories integrating past and future, or as Morin says, (2003b, p. 18), they experience the unusual in a unique way, that is, “the entire form of the human condition”.

In the piece, *The game and the child*, Jean Chateau (1987, p. 18) details how in each new experience, in each game, the child learns to provoke the new, to experiment with his possibilities, to have the pleasure of producing. In his words: “what pleases the child is less the result itself than the fact that he produced that result”. For the author, it is in make-believe play, in the creative game that “the child asserts his powers, proves his worth”, and I would say, with reference to the theory of subjectivity, that it is in this space that he can generate new senses, subjective aspects of communication and family relationships. I can say that in the therapeutic session there is a dialogical communicational process, which, as Morin (1998, p. 48) would say, “introduces pluralities, separations, oppositions, retroactivity and warmth” [...].

I know that in each therapeutic scenario there is a dialogical communication process in which there are unforeseen events, contradictions and paradoxes. I also know that each child, as a unique individual, “carries the entire form of the human condition” (Morin, 2003b, p. 18). I recognize that during the therapeutic process the singular child, in addition to carrying the entire form of the human condition, shows that his subjective development has a specific quality that is a condition for emerging or not as an agent or subject of his social process.

Psychotherapy with children as a social space for the development of the agent and subject of the social process

From the perspective of the theory of subjectivity, it is possible to build theoretical models that explain the uniqueness of the subjective development process of children. Since 2005, I have been building explanatory models of the development of children whose parents dispute their custody in court. The dialogic interpretative constructions of these children's actions and relationships with their parents take place in individual and joint therapeutic sessions,

enlivened by multiple ludic scenarios, without any prior theme or any methodological coercion. Our job is to think and build indicators and hypotheses about convergent subjective senses involved in the “as if” play that induces the therapeutic dialogue and the emergence of the organization of a subjective configuration.

Psychotherapy with children is a social space for communication and production of subjectivity. In the sessions there is dialogue about how their experiences are heightened in scenes and dramatic actions in the “as if” play. In this ludic space of dialogue, they tense up to the point of recreating their experiences with their imagination and fantasies, leading us to believe that they generated new subjective senses in relation to the problem.

Children engage in therapeutic dialogue with their subjective productions, without suppressing their contradictions in relation to their families and the conflicts of their parents. It is likely that in this process they learn to create and recreate their relationships in the family and outside of it, suggesting that there is development or qualitative changes in their subjective organization, which indicates that psychotherapy encourages the original process of constituting subjective configurations favorable to the emergence of the agent or the subject that subverts the established order enabling the development of society. As far as we are concerned psychotherapy with children, from the perspective of the theory of subjectivity, is a social space for education, learning and subjective development.

With the concept of subjective development, González Rey and Mitjans Martínez (2017) offer new knowledge for psychotherapy with children and challenge us to expand it considering the infinite possibilities that children have to emerge as agents or subjects of the social process. Motivated by this knowledge, I recognize that psychotherapy in childhood can favor the subjective development process of individuals in the course of their living histories, so that they can emerge as agents or subjects of their social processes. I therefore understand that the agent and subject categories represent the political character of the theory of subjectivity, having a special value in psychotherapy with children. As I suppose, this psychotherapy opens possibilities for the development of the quality of the children’s subjective organization and a continuous development of their condition as agents or subjects of the social process, which, recursively, brings possibilities for the subjective development of society.

While dealing with children, I privilege the development of the subject. In this process, children can learn about themselves and the other, develop the quality of subjective senses and subjective configurations that guide their actions, and emerge as subjects in a specific circumstance and at any other moment in life.

Agent and subject are categories that represent subjective processes of development, of which individuals are not immediately aware. From what González Rey and Mitjans Martínez (2017) say about these categories, I inferred that they have different qualities of engaging individuals to action. I understood that the quality that surrounds the subject makes it possible for him not only to be

active and participative, like the agent, but to subvert the established order favoring the development of society, which demonstrates the political aspect of the theory of subjectivity.

González Rey and Mitjans Martínez (2017) state that individuals are always active in their development processes, that is, they are never passive. As I see it, they mean that individuals can emerge as agents or subjects in different ways, with different expressions, in different circumstances.

From my point of view, children are active in their processes of development. During the litigation of their parents, they are often active and can emerge as subjects. I observe that they suffer and complain about the separation of their parents, who take a stand on the conflict generated by them in the marriage and, sometimes, even with actions that subvert the order of the dispute, transgressing its normativity. I have several examples of how children subvert the order of litigation by revealing the secrecy of the accusation to the therapist, even putting the accusing parent at risk, for not having evidence. We are going to comment on the case of a 6-year-old child, compulsorily separated from her father accused of abuse, who reveals the secrecy of the accusation, defining her subjective experience of the litigation, in which past and future emerge integrated in her living history. The constructive-interpretative dialogue of the information took place at different times, in individual and joint sessions involving all family members in a complex process.

We have built indicators of subjective senses and hypotheses about the “subjective configuration of the action”⁷ of this child when confronting her father and mother with questions about the conflict, the separation of the couple and the secrecy of the accusation without evidence. In the process of engaging in the constructive-interpretative dialogue, the child expresses her emotions and reveals the secrecy of the accusation, kept “under lock and key”, to protect the mother from punishment by the Justice: “my mother lied about my father, but the chief police cannot know otherwise he will arrest her”.

In the individual sessions, I emphasize her spontaneous and creative engagement in the dialogue about her parents' conflict through “intermediate objects” (cloth dolls that represent the family characters), as in this fragment: “I will tell you a story: the father arrived to see the children and played with them [...], the father gave the mother some money and she left [...] the father slept and when he woke up he asked: where is the money? The mother: I forgot it at the store”... The father got angry [...].

Dialogue is provoked through the intertwining of indicators and hypotheses about multiple subjective senses generated by the child in relation to her experiences in the family.

These subjective senses are involved in the organization of the child's speech at different moments of the therapeutic process and they are different from the social representation, which according to González Rey (2003) is a

⁷ “Self-generating formation, which arises from the diverse flow of subjective senses, producing, from its generating character, convergent groups of subjective senses that are expressed in the most stable subjective states of individuals in the course of an experience” (González Rey, & Mitjans Martínez, 2017, p. 63).

known reality and does not have a singular character, such as the subjective sense.

It turns out that, often, in a situation of separation or divorce, the permanent parent builds a representation of the other for the children based on their current needs and motivations. In this case, at various times the child shows commitment to the representation of a “bad” father and the need to protect her mother. The reality that the child knows about the separation and the father is the one that the mother presented her with and even if it sounds distant and confusing the child assumes it as real.

In the joint session, this child presents contradictory movements of distancing and approaching in relation to the father while looking at the family photo album. In this act, the tensioning of historical and current subjective senses transforms the quality of the dialogue between them.

The therapeutic dialogue is made possible by intertwining the indicators of these multiple subjective senses. Impacted, the child takes action and defines herself: “I’m suffering a lot [...] I don’t know what to do, should I stay here or should I stay there, one pulls me here and the other there [...].”

The fact that she interacted with her father in the dreaded joint session (monitored by the police and the police chief) and that she revealed the secrecy of the accusation is an important element for the interpretative construction of the subjective senses that she created from her experiences with him, not represented in a conscious way. Also, when she expressed herself about love, suffering, loss and guilt, she brought up the contradictory subjective senses that she generated in relation to her father and of which she is not aware.

Other excerpts, from other moments: “it’s my fault, it’s everyone’s fault” [...] “I can talk, but there are things I can’t” [...] “I’m good, but sometimes I lie a little (...) so as not to hurt my mother (...) I feel sorry for her (referring to her mother). I lie because sometimes I want to impress my mother. Everyone makes mistakes, right? I lie a little. But, if I speak, something very bad can happen, my mother can be arrested, she told me (...) “I lied because I don’t like my father and because he is mean”.

The “guilt”, however, may be implied in the subjectivity produced by her in relation to what she experienced while her parents separated, which she does not even remember anymore, “a long time ago, it was in the past” [...].

Although it comes from something very distant, from a story that she doesn’t even know for sure, subjectively configured, guilt acquires a unique form for her in her current suffering, that is, the parents’ litigation. That’s why she questions them, seeks explanations for the separation or perhaps seeks to understand their explanations about it, sometimes allowing herself or not to express them.

Then she seems to reflect: “you know, a very difficult decision had to be made, you know? The separation (...) very difficult (...) my mother (...) if I speak my mother can be arrested (...) the separation (...) very difficult. My mom [...]”.

In this dialogue, the child’s imagination emerges from the legal consequences of her mother’s action, enabling the construction of indicators of subjective senses generated by her in relation to the dispute.

The mother, in turn, by constructing a current representation of the father, makes it possible to interpret the subjective senses that she generated not only in relation to the couple's conflict or in relation to the father's impulsive affective expressions, but also regarding other experiences, perhaps, those which affected her own childhood.

As I understand it, the therapeutic dialogue made it possible for the child to develop subjective resources to position herself in relation to the father. It is possible that in this process she generated subjective senses that allowed her to take on the challenge of breaking with the social representation of “bad” (the father), created for her.

Therefore, I restate that the child can emerge as an agent or subject of the social process, depending on her subjective development or the quality of her subjective organization. On the other hand, not having their own ways of subjectivating their experiences in interrelated systems, such as the family and the judiciary, it is possible that they feel oppressed and present the most diverse symptoms. Psychotherapy can be an opportunity to open up their own subjectivation pathways in relation to these interrelated systems, to break with inappropriate names for childhood, traditionally attributed to adults, like bipolar disorder.

According to Vasen (2011), an Argentine psychiatrist and psychoanalyst, an epidemic of inappropriate names indicates that there is a wrong use of language for children's symptoms. This is the hegemonic language of the biomedical model, which dominates science and professional practice. I point out that this model makes it difficult to understand subjectivity, which “has no intelligibility in the visible and immediate”, and enables us to recognize “a generative, active subject, creator of realities (González Rey, 2014, p. 36).

The theory of subjectivity thus inaugurates a new framework for reflecting on health-disease processes, which I seek to make intelligible in psychotherapy with children. I seek to make the uniqueness of the cultural-historical process of children's development intelligible, without excluding the interrelated systems in which they live from this process: the family, the school, the child care network, the health care system, among others. Psychotherapy, in this perspective, offers children during the process of litigation between their parents the opportunity to realize their spontaneity, to open their own ways of subjectivation and to develop the condition of agent or subject of the social process. They can develop the quality of their subjective organization and creatively position themselves on the norms of the family, the judiciary and other interrelated systems, such as the school, for example.

With this, we reached in psychotherapy with children what González Rey (2004, 2005) supposes about the dynamic and recursive interrelationship between individual and social subjectivity that represents a complex system. Briefly, we have achieved what González Rey and Mitjáns Martínez (2017) assume when they state that in the micro and macro, individual and social spaces, a set of subjective configurations of multiple interrelated systems emerge.

In the therapeutic process with children who experience their parents' litigation, their subjectivities articulated with the subjectivity of the family and

the subjectivity of the legal institution emerge. The subjectivity of the family, in relation to the children, integrates a multiplicity of shared symbolic productions. For example, symbolic productions about human development, about health, about learning and others. We can say that in the therapeutic process with children symbolic and emotional productions or multiple subjective senses generated by them, by their families and by the judicial system emerge, forming a “symbolic-emotional chain” that guides their actions in the dispute.

At this moment, psychotherapy, as education and learning, can be a differential in the subjective development process of the children, the families and the judicial system. It is possible that the symbolic productions (beliefs, values, myths) of these interrelated systems reach a subjective level, which, for González Rey and Mitijáns Martínez (2017, p. 63) would be necessary for the “definition of a new quality in the subjective organization” of these systems.

Certainly my history working with children and their families from the perspective of Levy Moreno (1997), an author who made “an alliance with human health”, makes it easier for me to engage in this psychotherapy perspective, understanding that there is no determinism in the configurational system of subjectivity, that individuals can open “new ways of subjectivation” in relation to social meanings and that this opening favors the generation of new subjective senses and new subjective configurations in relation to what they experience.

I understand that, from this perspective, psychotherapy favors the development of individuals' subjective configurational systems, to the point of developing the condition of agents or subjects in the social process.

The emergence of new subjective senses and new subjective configurations in the therapeutic process

Our hypothesis about the example presented above is that the child generated new subjective senses during the therapeutic process in relation to the separation of her parents and emerged as a subject of her own development when she transgressed the legal norms, revealed the legal secrecy and defined herself in relation to her closest ones.

This explains how the two interrelated concepts – subjective senses and subjective configurations – guide the individual's actions, without them being immediately aware of them (González Rey, 2002).

Like this one, many other examples encourage me to discuss the value of psychotherapy with children for the development of individuals as agents and subjects in the social process. This practice integrates past, present and future processes of subjective development, and makes us understand that “the complete vitality of life” integrates dynamically interrelated moments. As stated by González Rey and Mitijáns Martínez (2017, p. 63), “this new type of process emerges in culturally organized social life, allowing the integration of past and future as an inseparable quality of current subjective production”.

I even dare to confirm that in psychotherapy with children and also with adults at different moments in life, the past, present and future unit is organized in a subjective configuration (“a self-generating formation”).

According to González Rey and Mitjáns Martínez (2017, p. 63) this configuration “arises from the diverse flow of subjective senses, producing, from its generative character, convergent groups of subjective senses that are expressed in the most stable subjective states of individuals in the course of an experience”.

In addition to this, I would say that the most stable states of individuals appear in different circumstances of life, for example, in the legal litigation of ex-spouses for the custody of their children. Apparently, these states are part of a group of subjective senses generated throughout their lives and which, subjectively configured, emerge in this circumstance. I mean that they emerge in a subjective configuration that predominates and guides their actions in that circumstance (Peres, 2014, 2022).

This dominant subjective configuration in the dispute, complexly interrelated with the subjective development processes of the ex-spouses, challenges me to think about the value of psychotherapy with children as a social space for education and learning, as a social space that can favor their subjective development processes or the emergence of a subjective configuration, whose quality allows them to emerge as agents or subjects at this and other moments of life. So, I think that, even with great emotional burdens and suffering, these children can manage, at different times in their lives, to integrate past and future into opening new ways of subjectivating their current experiences.

Nevertheless, there are cases where this does not happen. I can give an example of an adult whose suffering is a subjective production of what he experienced in childhood. He is unable, in his current experiences, to integrate his past and future, and for not opening new subjectivation pathways nor generating new subjective senses from his past experiences, he does not generate new subjective configurations, constituting a pathological process.

González Rey (2007) states that it is the flow of historical and current subjective senses that allows individuals to always generate new subjective configurations, qualitatively different, and “new significant subjective resources for their relationships”.

I recognize this flow in the dynamism of the children's and adults' stories and that psychotherapy is the opportunity for them to generate new subjective senses of their relational experiences and emerge as agents or subjects in their social processes. I acknowledge that psychotherapy, in both cases, integrates the historical and the present, and it is sensitive to the possibility of dynamic reorganization of their experiences. I observe that in the therapeutic process with children subjective senses of different experiences emerge and that in psychotherapy with adults subjective senses of different moments of life emerge. With this, I confirm that in the theory of subjectivity there is no separation between past, present and future.

Past and future are inseparable qualities of the current subjective production. Past and future form a subjective unit marked by the imagination

(and fantasies) of the individual in relation to the experience (González Rey, & Mitjáns Martínez, 2017), representing the procedural and dynamic character of subjectivity.

This inseparability between past and future makes it possible to understand how multiple historical and current subjective senses integrate the most stable subjective configuration of ex-spouses in litigation, a formation that guides their actions in this life circumstance. While working with ex-couples, the interpretative construction of supposedly more stable configurations makes it possible to understand the interrelationship of different configurations and how they differ in the circumstance of litigation, even with the subjective configurations of the children (Peres, 2022). I recall that building up an interpretation of these configurations requires complex thinking, processual thinking, which interrelates historical and current subjective senses (Peres, 2022), that is, it requires understanding and explaining how the agent and the subject are gradually constituted throughout life.

This means that, even without being aware of it, individuals constitute subjective processes of development that allow or prevent them from emerging as agents or subjects of the social process (González Rey, & Mitjáns Martínez, 2017). According to the authors, both the agent and the subject have an active character; they think, act and organize themselves, generating a multiplicity of subjective senses and subjective configurations of which they are not immediately aware.

It is also noteworthy that Vygotsky (2001), in his work *Psychology of Art*, as analyzed by González Rey (2013), defines consciousness as a system, which for the author is a procedural organization, certainly a subjective organization of lived experience, a more complex system “and that it transcends what can be considered as cognition” (González Rey, 2014, p. 41).

In psychotherapy there are times when individuals, without being immediately aware of their actions, accuse the other of being responsible for the problem. At other times, when there is tension between emotional and symbolic productions, they own their actions, dialogue and reflect on them, repositioning themselves. I think that this ownership (Peres, 2022) represents subjective development, the quality of a subjective configuration that leads them to act or to emerge as subjects of the social process by subverting the order of litigation and the organization of the legal institution.

As González Rey and Mitjáns Martínez (2017) explain, emerging as an agent or subject depends on the quality of the subjective configuration that causes the individuals to turn into subjects, which is different from the subjective configuration that causes them to emerge as agents. According to the authors, the subjects transcend the normativity of the contexts in which they live, opening their own ways of subjectivation with their creativity, while the agents act according to the normativity of the contexts.

Thus, the process of subjective development, according to González Rey and Mitjáns Martínez (2017), is a continuous process without any regularity. In this process, individuals generate new subjective configurations, qualitatively different. In other words, the emergence of new subjective senses and new

subjective configurations, with new qualities, enable individuals to carry out the necessary changes to new forms of actions and relationships.

Indicators show that the therapeutic process with children enables qualitative changes in their subjective organization. As in other moments of life, in this process they can, for example, generate new subjective senses in relation to the conflict between parents and a configuration that leads them to reorganize their experiences in the family, at school or in other social spaces. I think that this process in childhood favors the emergence of the agent and the subject at any other moment in life.

I give the example of another adult, for whom psychotherapy in childhood favored his subjective development process. At that moment, he committed himself to his therapeutic process, which I suppose generated new subjective senses in relation to the family's disorders and new subjective configurations that made him free himself from the oppression of a deterministic diagnosis and the constitution of a pathological process. There are indicators pointing that the subjective senses he generated from this childhood experience were favorable to his emergence as a subject of the therapeutic and social processes. We conclude that he emerged as a subject of these processes by making “a revolution” in his subjective organization and in the quality of his life process, subverting the order of illness processes of other members in his family. The fact is that he managed to subvert his way of life and his relationships, no longer isolating himself and “consciously” positioning himself in the interrelated systems in which he lives and develops himself. The most interesting thing was that the subjective configuration of the pathology, relatively stable in childhood, and represented by behaviors of non-interaction or social distancing, did not define his subjective development. His subjective configurational system, in ongoing development, enabled him to generate new subjective senses and new subjective configurations in relation to the family disorder, illness processes and, probably, to have remained engaged in the therapeutic process. Probably his continuous engagement in this process, since childhood, made it possible to generate other subjective configurations, without any regularity, but qualitatively different and favorable to the development of his condition as an agent and subject of the social process.

By questioning about how the individual achieves these conditions in their subjective development process, I recognize the value of psychotherapy with children, and occasionally, those who experience the legal dispute between their parents.

Psychotherapy with children, subjective development and the emergence of the agent and the subject of the social process

Children's emotional, active and creative engagement in the therapeutic dialogue suggests a possibility for them to emerge as an agent or as a subject of the social process. Their engagement in the dialogue about the “subjective-relational plot”

of parents in legal litigation expresses their subjective development processes, involved with the process of developing their emotionality.

Regarding the development of emotionality, I observe what González Rey (2005) states, when he says that in this process children express their needs and fantasies before any sort of reflection on their actions and relationships. Before understanding their relationships, they generate subjective senses about the emotional atmosphere of these relationships and these subjective senses integrate the subjective configuration that guides their actions, which sometimes represent pathologies of the biomedical model.

Once again, resorting to Vasen (2011), I suspect that the “inappropriate names” that children receive are representative of specialists' lack of knowledge about singular processes of emotionality development.

That is the case of children diagnosed with Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD) or with Autistic Spectrum Disorder, whose emotionality precedes their understanding of the conflict and litigation between their parents. I do not discuss what those children present (their symptoms?): restlessness, lack of attention and aggressiveness in the family context, but how this is their way of expressing a set of emotions from the subjective senses that they generated in relation to the conflict and parental litigation. I infer how these emotions, imaginatively associated with social meanings, are subjectively configured and guide their actions. At this point, I find it interesting to spot some of the imagination concepts by the philosopher Riccoeur (1913-2005). For the philosopher, imagination is “the arbitrary invocation of absent things”, of fictions that make the individual “believe in a reality that is misleading”. From his point of view, the imagination can be deceptive or serve criticism, reproduce or produce. (Riccoeur & Castoriadis, 2016, p. 76).

There is much evidence that the symptoms presented by children in the process of separation between their parents are emotional and symbolic (imaginative) productions, which justify psychotherapy at this moment in life as a space for learning and subjective development. It can be argued that it is a space for transforming the quality of the imagination, which, if not pathological, can be associated with complex fantasies of the child about the experience with the parents and complex emotions.

González Rey (2007) states that emotion is a form of expression of the individual in relation to an experience. As he exemplifies, children's irritation can be implicated with a combination of emotions that “do not correspond to a structure of meanings”, but express their “psychological state”.

In the case of a child diagnosed with ADHD, or with autism spectrum disorder, I understand that he is sensitive to the conflicts between his parents and the symbolic consequences of this conflict in the family system. The indicators suggest that he generated subjective senses and subjective configuration that led him to act. However, his action compromised the quality of his relationships with his parents and the possibility of the emergence of new subjective senses and new emotions. Psychotherapy was the opportunity to express his emotionality in relation to what he had experienced in the family and to understand how this emotionality was involved in his relationships. Like this example, others have

inspired me to think about how psychotherapy allows children to express their “emotional state” in relation to an experience (Peres, 1983) and generate new subjective senses in relation to it.

In this example, my hypothesis is that this child's emotional state is implicated with subjective senses of a subjective configuration that evokes various emotions like fear, insecurity and rejection, all of them committed with symbolic manifestations, such as attacking the father, distancing himself from the father and continually requesting the mother, among others. It is likely that these symbolic manifestations form a complex subjective network, inaccessible to the comprehension of parents and specialists. I understand this to be the current form of expression for this child, probably guided by a relatively stable subjective configuration, which favors the perpetuation of the emotional climate in family relationships and hinders the emergence of new subjective senses in relation to the conflict between parents.

According to González Rey (2007), if the subjective senses do not change, integrating the individual's relatively stable subjective configuration, there is no therapeutic change.

As for the above-mentioned example, we found that for a long time there were no significant changes in the child's family system, in the relationships between his parents, in their relationships with the child, who increasingly distanced himself from their expectations for his development, how to be well-mannered and attentive to their commands, and know how to conduct himself simultaneously. I believe that the change implies that the parents would generate new subjective senses in relation to the child's manifestations.

Translating the thought of González Rey (2007, p. 138) on examples like this, it is possible to understand that the child “does not live the experience in a neutral way”, that he “expresses a set of expectations and subjective states” related to the subjective configuration that guides his actions.

Still in our example, my assumption was that the child expressed the expectation that the parents would not fight and that his subjective state was related to a subjective configuration that represented the beginning of his subjective development process, a process that will define his differentiated expression, such as the case of the adult, previously presented.

As for the hegemony of a subjective configuration in a given context or life circumstance, I agree with González Rey (2007) that it requires further studies. Although this theme has been approached by me in the study of the legal litigation between ex-spouses for child custody (Peres, 2022), I still have many unanswered questions, mainly about how the cultural history of individuals, since birth, can be understood in psychotherapy.

As stated by González Rey (2007, p. 138), “the subjective configuration is fed and developed from a variety of subjective senses generated by the individual in the context of his actions”, but it maintains “stable nuclei of subjective production” that must be identified in the varied forms they assume in human behavior”.

Children expressing the quality of their emotional systems in the therapeutic space draws my attention; how this quality enables them to act in

difficult life circumstances. In this regard, we have the example of a child who expressed his emotionality in the circumstances of his parent's death, even before understanding the meanings of his action in "trying to save him", or how this action was implicated with his needs and affective motivations, or his expectations and his emotional state.

For González Rey (2005, p. 21), the development of emotionality "is the result of the convergence and the confrontation of meaning elements constituted in individual subjectivity, as an expression of the subject's history [...]".

It is possible that the development of the child's emotionality in our example is the result of the convergence and the confrontation of subjective senses in relation to his experiences with his parents, before and after separation. It is possible that, by positioning himself with his subjectivity in relation to the parent, he has emotionally transcended the linear and direct influences of the family system. Also, these subjective senses may be at the basis of his subversion in the order of the family system. With this subversion, I can assume that his subjectivity was unfolded and developed amid objective processes of his family's social organization. I suppose that the subjective senses that he generated from his parent's separation and death experiences may represent, as González Rey (2007) explains, another way in which this complex reality affected him.

In order to expand this thought, I continue to practice the interpretative construction of multiple singular cases or the understanding of the object of psychotherapy with children, their subjective development. As I say, the social space of psychotherapy with children enables the interpretative construction of a set of indicators on the subjective senses that they generate from communication and family relationships, subjective senses that are dynamically interrelated in a configuration of their developing subjective system.

Subjective senses emerge in this space in a disorganized, chaotic way, especially in the dialogic scenarios of make-believe plays in the "as if" simulation. They are not directly explicit in children's speech, narratives, or behaviors. The psychotherapists build indicators of subjective sense, based on hypotheses, inferences and their knowledge about the theory of subjectivity, childhood, family and others. By establishing an interpretation of the subjective configuration that guides the actions of a child, the therapist finds elements to develop the explanatory theoretical model of this unique process of subjective development and produce knowledge about the value of psychotherapy for this continuous process.

When working with families in litigation processes (Peres, 2022) it occurs to me that children are guided by subjective configurations in continuous development. I understand that they generate subjective senses related to their relationships with their parents, as well as the daily communication between them, and that these subjective senses form the subjective configuration that guides their actions. This moment of life – childhood – is of great sensitivity for the constitution of a subjective configuration involved with subjective senses generated in relation to what is lived in the immediate social space, the family. Including, in this space of great sensitivity for educational communication, there

can be learning favoring their subjective development, and their condition as agents and subjects of the social process.

Educational communication, as discussed by Tacca (2019, p. 139), “always accompanied by speeches, gestures, glances” [...] offers “many interpretative possibilities” that, as I think, may or may not result in significant learning for the subjective development of individuals. By being inserted in a new subjective configuration, with a new quality, it can cause individuals to emerge as agents or subjects of the social process. Therefore, I say: the subjective senses generated by the child in relation to this communication can emerge in different ways, at different times of his subjective development process, that is, involved with a new subjective configuration, which has a new quality. This requires the family to value the child in the communicative process, instigating this child to be active, reflective, and to freely express his fantasies and conflicts in relation to what he has experienced and to create alternatives to it with actions in the course of which he can generate new subjective senses in relation what he has lived.

Furthermore, in González Rey (2007, p. 29), I understand that the subjective senses that the individual generates from their experiences “are inseparable from the subjective configurations of their historical-social condition”, a condition that generates both individual and social subjective senses, generator of subjectivities.

I only have indicators about this. For example, the indicator that the historical and social condition of the child previously mentioned, an unstable and unpredictable condition, is inseparable from the subjective configuration that guides his actions in the family and at school, interrelated systems and producers of subjective senses. I am aware that in these interrelated systems, childhood is a time of “openness to the new”, of curiosity, but also of conflicts and contradictions. From the perspective of the theory of subjectivity, conflicts are a source of subjective development, which justifies psychotherapy with children who experience parental litigation. The therapeutic dialogue about their conflicts, as I propose, takes place in the midst of a play, which is how children originally express their emotionality. I propose the therapeutic dialogue about contradictions and conflicts to happen during an “as if” play.

I understand that this resource opens “zones of senses” for the children's learning about human values and principles, such as respecting themselves and others; being fair to themselves and others. In this social space of education, learning and subjective development, the children and their families dialogue about their conflicts, embodying different characters, who assume different features, with their own principles and values. I understand that this space generates new subjective senses of what the children experience in interrelated systems, certainly inseparable from the subjective configuration of their historical-social conditions.

In this social space, which is different from other spaces, children can open their own ways of subjectivating their experiences and parents can understand the development of their emotions and come up with new subjective senses about their manifestations.

Here's another example: a nine-year-old girl, who even contrary to her mother's expectations, takes a stand on her need and motivation to live with her non-custodial parent. Apparently, she generated subjective senses and configuration that led her to open up her own ways of subjectivation about her parents' litigation. The dialogue on this theme, in the "as if" play, was enough to express in a playful way her emotionality, which we assume is susceptible to the emergence of the agent or the subject in the process of the parents' litigation. Regarding the mother, we have indicators that she understood the child's emotionality and no longer embarrassed her with threats of abandonment, for courageously expressing her intention to "live with her father".

However, considering the theory of subjectivity, I still have many questions about these processes and about the value of psychotherapy in childhood for the subjective development of individuals and that, according to González Rey and Mitjáns Martínez (2017), is the development of resources that allow them to bring about "qualitative changes in different areas of life". The authors state that these changes originate in individuals "an ever deeper personal involvement in the area in which the subjective configuration of development is organized" (Mitjáns Martínez & González Rey, 2017, p. 23).

Considering this statement, I continue to study how the subjective configurations of development are organized in children who live the experience of their parents' litigation. Even nowadays, immersed in this field, I keep studying multiple cases and seek to build explanatory theoretical models on how different subjective configurations of development are organized in children and also in their parents.

With my hypotheses on the historical development of the agent and the subject, I follow the organization of the past, present and future unit in the therapeutic work. I try to understand how it organizes itself in new subjective configurations, qualitatively different, in each singular case. I keep track of how an adult, for example, without losing the original power of therapeutic learning in childhood, emerges as the subject of his social process, by subverting the order of an oppressive, pathologizing marital relationship. I interpreted that this is the result of his subjective development or that it represents the dynamic flow between multiple and diverse past subjective senses (originated in childhood) and current subjective senses, some of them developed in the ongoing therapeutic process.

This is my starting point when situating the value of psychotherapy with children for the emergence of subjectively configured qualities, in a continuous process of development. My hypothesis is that these emergences indicate that children have subjective resources or that they act guided by the quality of their subjective organization and not just by influences or impositions from the family system. As in the aforementioned case, these resources can emerge at any other time in life, with a new quality. Explicitly bringing the concept of Morin (2003c, p. 139), that "emergence is a new quality in relation to the components of the system", a concept that defines the objective of psychotherapy with children who experience parental litigation.

What happens is that the child emerges in the family system and sets all its components in motion. She tries as hard as she can to express her grief and take a stand against the system. I suppose that in this movement she develops new subjective senses of her communicational and relational experiences in the family and outside of it (Peres, 2022). This assumption is my guiding thread. I have indicators that the child, even though she can not communicate clearly through speech, does not subject herself to the social representations constructed for her.

As Morin (2003b) would say, she does not subject herself to the limits that speech imposes on communication. I have examples that, even when speech is incipient, children manage to communicate about their affective relationships. They signify them through the emotional tone of the scenarios they create for the make-believe play, for the “as” simulation. As noted (Vygotsky, 1996), even before speech, “children signify more the 'emotional nuance' of their social spaces than their objective aspects”.

This nuance allows the therapist to interpret the subjective senses they generate from communication and relationships in the family (Peres, 2001). I know that the subjective senses they generate from communication and their relationships in the family have an emotional nuance or that they carry a set of contradictory, conflicting emotions that affect their “body and mind”, but sometimes, to the point of developing the most diverse symptoms (Peres, 2022).

Under this perspective psychotherapy is the opportunity for children to be heard, embraced, understood and to create, with their spontaneity, alternatives to their own suffering embroiled with conflicting subjective senses. In a previous work (Peres, 2001), about “street children” and their families, I developed the hypothesis that conflicting, antagonistic subjective senses (historical and current) generated by them in relation to communication in the family, motivate them to “flee to the street”. I think they motivate them to break with the normative space of the family and to choose the street or the street group as a new social space for development. With the construction of several theoretical models to explain this process, I meant it as a singular process of subjective constitution of the subject, the one that, according to González Rey (2003), at some point in life, is capable of subverting the social space in which he lives, with options that go against the normativity of this space.

At that moment, this knowledge brought up a new “zone of sense” for understanding the cultural-historical process of subjective constitution of the so-called “street child”, but, above all, a new zone of sense for understanding the cultural-historical process of constituting the subject from the perspective of the theory of subjectivity. At that time, the knowledge about the unique processes of development of these children makes the theory of subjectivity legitimate for it surpasses the determinism and the simplification of classical science. Nowadays, with this knowledge, it is possible to discuss the value of psychotherapy with children for the process of subjective development of individuals.

Final considerations

I reinforce that psychotherapy with children is a social space for education and learning, and that it is sensitive to their affective needs. The psychotherapist is the significant other, with whom children communicate about their actions and relationships, and to whom they express emotions imaginatively associated with the family's social representations of them, and from which I think they can emancipate themselves. Certainly, psychotherapy with children is not an imposition and needs to reach the idea of complex causality present in the theory of subjectivity, defined as a generating system, in constant organization and reorganization.

From my point of view, this social space for education and learning favors the spontaneous and creative expression of emotions, conflicts, imagination and fantasies of the children about the experience and the constitution of a relatively stable subjective configuration, with quality for them to take action as agents or subjects at that time and at future times. The construction-interpretation of the information allows me to confirm that the past, present and future unit is organized in qualitatively different subjective configurations in different moments of life. I dare to infer that the "most stable subjective states of individuals" represent multiple and diverse subjective senses generated throughout their histories, without any regularity, and that there is a dynamic flow between them, whether they converge or not.

Some indicators point out that in the actions that impact parents in litigation and destabilize the judicial process, children can generate subjective senses of a more stable subjective configuration. It is likely that in these actions children are under tension, enhancing emerging qualities of their developing subjective configurational system.

This process may represent the possibility of developing the subject condition, that is, the possibility of differentiating oneself from the normative processes of the family, even implying tension and antagonisms. So, I reaffirm the definition of the subject by the theory of subjectivity, which involves the definition of development as a subjective process, interrelated, dynamically and recursively, with what is lived in the tension of social life. I also reaffirm Morin's thought (2003b), that the subject emerges, that is, it is not an imposed condition.

With these ideas, I suggest that the therapist's actions, not even a constructive-interpretative dialogue, impact the children by straining their social processes; that these actions favor the original process of constitution of subjective configurations allowing them to emerge as subjects, to subvert the instituted order favoring their development and the development of their families. Thus, I reiterate that psychotherapy with children is a social space for education and learning and is sensitive to the children's affective needs. The psychotherapist is the significant other, with whom they communicate about their actions and relationships and to whom they express emotions imaginatively associated with the family's social representations of them, and from which I think they can emancipate themselves with spontaneity and creativity.

So, I can confirm that learning to emancipate oneself is not easy, it requires creating “one's own path of subjectivation”, which implies suffering when facing difficult life circumstances. I have several examples: that of ex-couples who, despite suffering, choose to become subjects of marital conflict; that of children who break with the desired family life and, contradictorily, assume the street as a social space for development; and the example of children who experience the dispute of their parents and who, even afraid of being rejected or abandoned, position themselves before their parents about their affective needs and their conflicts. Even with suffering, there are children who sometimes subvert the order of litigation, probably emerging as subjects in their social space.

Finally, I would presume that, especially in the context of parental litigation, new qualities may emerge in children's subjective organization. This emergence opens up a new intelligibility about the value of psychotherapy at this moment in life, and about its value for the development of the agent and the subject as defined in the theory of subjectivity. I can say that, from this perspective, therapy with children gains a political status, because it “inverts the sovereignty of command” in the game of power, both in the “as if” simulation and outside of it. For this, the therapist needs to act from the children's perspectives, that is, to get involved with them in make-believe plays, so that the communication about differences, antagonisms and complementarities of relationships in the family is expanded.

There is strong evidence that this inversion allows children to set their generating capacity to motion, emerging new subjective senses in tension with historical subjective senses. Everything indicates that this may be the root of the individual's subjective development, of their condition as subjects of the social process.

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Why we need to consider agency to understand traumatization: A critical psychological approach

Lena Schwaab

Abstract

Traumatization is not a purely personal and isolated experience of acute threat, loss of control or disempowerment. From a critical psychological perspective (following Klaus Holzkamp), traumatization is political in several respects: it is embedded in a social context and therefore, in addition to considering the personal factors of those affected, social, economic and political conditions that allow and reproduce the contributing violence in the first place must also be analyzed. It is important to understand the involvement and entanglement of those affected in the traumatizing processes from the perspective of their change. The critical-psychological basic category of agency, understood as the socially mediated possibility of the subject's disposal over their living conditions, opens up these political dimensions of traumatization and provides a new perspective on the frequently-made distinction of traumatization solely according to its "trigger situation" in natural disasters (e.g. earthquakes, floods) and man-made disasters (e.g. torture, rape). The latter show a higher risk of developing post-traumatic stress disorder, without providing a convincing explanation as to why. A critical psychological approach further suggests not only looking at the initial situation, but also understanding the traumatic process as both an exclusion from participation in social provision and as a denial of the possibility of extended disposal over the conditions of life (generalized agency). In this article, after a brief introduction to the core concepts of Critical Psychology according to Holzkamp and the resulting understandings of mental disorders, I would like to demonstrate the extent to which traumatization must be understood as political. Subsequently, I would like to discuss previous critical psychological discussions on traumatization, as well as show how agency expands the understanding of traumatization, how this can be illustrated by examples of man-made and natural disasters, and why generalized agency is particularly relevant in this context.

Keywords

Critical Psychology, traumatization, agency, man-made vs. natural disaster, psychotherapy

„Du fielest, aber du fällst nicht
Augen fangen dich auf“
Hilde Domin

Introduction

During my studies in psychology, I was repeatedly frustrated by the single-factor reduction of the context in which individuals live. My understanding of traumatization was initially shaped by a clinical psychology lecture during my bachelor studies, in which trauma was described as a particularly strong stressor that exceeds the processing capacities of the affected person and is thus to be understood in a stimulus-response scheme. Some time later, during an internship in a psychiatric-psychosomatic clinic, I experienced how truncated this view of stimulus-response is. For a patient who had been in a Soviet labor camp, the prevailing power and dependency relationships in the clinic led to repeated experiences of powerlessness and disempowerment. After that, the question arose for me: What can actual support in the sense of empowerment processes look like? Critical Psychology with its version of the close interconnectedness of society and the individual can be helpful in understanding the multi-dimensional sources and impacts of trauma. In the following article, I will first discuss how traumatization can be grasped and why it should be understood politically. Then I will outline the basic concepts of Critical Psychology according to Klaus Holzkamp, and here I would like to introduce in particular the concept of agency, which makes psychopathological symptomatology easier to understand and also offers new perspectives in the case of traumatization. This will be explained by means of practical examples, which can be differentiated into *man-made* and *natural disasters*. Natural disasters include disasters of a natural cause such as tidal waves, tsunamis, or major storms, whereas man-made disasters tend to refer to interpersonal violence such as in wars, in rape, and in torture. The latter are often attributed a higher pathological potential for the development of post-traumatic stress disorder (Kessler et al., 1995), but without psychologically elucidating this difference. The category of agency, especially generalized agency, may contribute to a better understanding of the concept of traumatization. It should be noted that in order to understand individual traumatic processes, cooperation with the affected subjects is necessary. Thus, my remarks cannot speak to individual cases, but rather offer suggestions as to what extent the contextualized understanding of trauma can be expanded by adding the generalized agency, so that the suffering of those affected can be better understood, and the necessary support that results from this can be derived.

What is traumatization and why is it political?

Traumatization is often understood in the context of the clinical diagnosis of post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD). Trauma, according to the ICD-10

definition, is "a stressful event or situation (of either brief or long duration) of an exceptionally threatening or catastrophic nature, which is likely to cause pervasive distress in almost anyone" (World Health Organization, 2016). The development of PTSD is a possible subsequent reaction, which is characterized by the core symptomatology of re-experiencing in the form of intrusive, distressing thoughts and memories of the trauma (intrusions), hyperarousal, emotional numbness, and avoidance behaviors in relation to trauma-associated stimuli (Flatten et al., 2011). However, diagnoses may not reflect a person's difficulties in the context of their personal outlook and life management (Pedersen, 2019). Although a diagnosis can also lead to relief by classifying the suffering, at the same time, affected individuals are pathologized and defined as "sick people." Further criticisms of the classification of mental disorders should be referred to at this point (see Davies, 2021).

Diagnoses are not purely objective categories, since they are also shaped by present political and social factors. The extent to which the view of traumatization and trauma research have been significantly shaped and influenced by the aforementioned factors is described by Judith Herman (2003) in her historical analysis of trauma research. It is thanks to the political demands of self-organized veterans' groups after the Vietnam War that the diagnosis of PTSD was included in the catalog of the *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual* (DSM) for the first time in 1980 and thus scientifically recognized. The women's movement ultimately contributed to the recognition of domestic and sexual violence and to the understanding of all rape as an act of violence.

Trauma is often viewed from a biomedical perspective (Becker, 2014; Brensell, 2014), which portrays the traumatic situation as an extraordinarily powerful stressor that results in the inability to properly consolidate memory content. Consequently, the focus in therapy is on strengthening individual coping strategies and reintegrating the trauma through exposure to the memory of the triggering situation (Brensell, 2014; Flatten et al., 2011). Here, the focus on neurobiologically oriented therapy fits into a neoliberal approach aimed at short-term symptom reduction. Also fitting into this picture is the rise of pharmacological and neurocognitive research, in which certain medications such as propranolol and hydrocortisone, as well as cognitive tasks following trauma exposure, are thought to influence memory consolidation to reduce symptoms (Astill Wright et al., 2021; Steckler & Risbrough, 2012). The inherent shift therein transfigures the affected subject's response as disturbed and changeable, leaving untouched the external conditions that led to such a traumatic situation in the first place. Thus, the actual causes and sociopolitical dimensions of traumatization are disregarded (Mlodoč, 2017). This allegedly apolitical attitude is, according to David Becker (2014), extremely reactionary, and an exclusive fight against symptoms in trauma work thus completely loses its *raison d'être*.

The idea of adding the social context to the understanding of traumatization is not new and was mainly implemented in the concept of *sequential traumatization* developed by Hans Keilson (1979). This understanding of trauma emphasizes "that traumatizations are not simple sequential reactions to events that overwhelm the psyche but must be seen in their entire course in relation to

the surrounding milieu" (Becker, 2014, p. 18). In his long-term study of Jewish war orphans in the Netherlands, Keilson elaborated on different sequences of traumatization that focus on both the time before and after the traumatic event. Of particular significance here is that the last phase after the war was "described by many respondents as the most intrusive and painful of their lives" (Keilson, 1979, p. 58). During this period, when the actual processing of the experience was supposed to take place, attempts at rehabilitation and reappraisal often led to a reinforcement of the trauma suffered. With his work, he conceptualizes trauma as a socially mediated process and thus not only focuses on the question of how society deals with trauma victims, but at the same time examines the living conditions before the onset of the actual traumatic situation. David Becker expanded this conceptualization to sociopolitical trauma processes and emphasizes a psychosocial version of trauma (Becker, 2014, p. 18). This is followed by a contextualized understanding of trauma, which includes "knowledge of social conditions, life contexts [...], power and dependency relationships, myths and prejudices towards trauma victims" (Brensell, 2014, p. 124) in order to make the complex, psychological reactions understandable. Consequently, a classic psychiatric conception of trauma falls short of grasping the complexity of the socially mediated process of traumatization. In her article "What is traumatization? A Critical Psychological critique and reformulation" Pedersen (2019) formulates a subject-scientific approach to the conception of trauma, in which she understands trauma as a process of a personal and overwhelming sense of loss of control embedded in the concrete time and place of everyday living. In doing so, she makes references to Holzkamp's Critical Psychology, which will be discussed in more detail below.

Introduction to some core concepts of critical psychology according to Klaus Holzkamp

Based on the critique of science of the student movement around 1968, and especially influenced by the work of Klaus Holzkamp (esp. '*Grundlegung der Psychologie*' from 1983), Critical Psychology rejects the attempts to objectively record subjective experiences of classical experimental psychology (Holzkamp, 1988). In contrast, Holzkamp calls for research with subjects rather than about them within the framework of subject science (*Subjektwissenschaft*), which implies taking a standpoint of the subject. This is directed "against psychology as a science of domination and adaptation and against the psychologization of social contradictions" (Holzkamp, 1983, p. 25), and thus formulates a coherent view of critique of psychology and society. Here, an "exclusionary juxtaposition of the 'nature' and the 'sociality' of man" (Holzkamp, 1988, p. 304) is criticized, since this disregards an active, formative influence of the subject on its living conditions. The subject is in a double relationship to social, objective conditions, because on the one hand they live under them, but they also create and shape them themselves (Holzkamp, 1983, p. 354) and are thus involved in the reproduction of the conditions. These conditions, however, do not determine

action nor are they based on a subjective creation of meaning. Rather, subjective actions are "'grounded' in the conditions of life" (Holzkamp, 1983, p. 348). *Subjective reasons for action* (or reasons for short) thus form the "mediating category [... in which] contexts of justification in the 'medium' of structures of meaning and their representation in forms of thought and language are grasped as a 'subjectively'-action-relevant aspect of the contexts of conditions" (Holzkamp, 1983, p. 348). This is described as a meaning-justification context.

Every subjective justification of action is based on the individual need situation and thus it can "contradict my objective life interests, but not my human needs and life interests as I experience them as my situation" (Holzkamp, 1983, p. 350). From this assumption Holzkamp concludes that human beings cannot consciously harm themselves (*a priori of individual science*). Every action is subjectively functional with respect to the satisfaction of needs. Moreover, they must be "intersubjectively comprehensible," which means that if actions are grounded in the needs and life interests of the subject, these reasons must also be comprehensible to others. Even in the case of behaviors that occur in the context of a mental disorder, the justifications of these are, in principle, reconstructable.

The role of agency

The possibilities of the subject to relate to their conditions of life come to bear especially in their agency (*Handlungsfähigkeit*). The critical-psychological conception of agency is a "disposition over one's own living conditions that is mediated by society as a whole" (Holzkamp, 1983, p. 239), which results from the subject's participation in the provision of society as a whole. Agency can be viewed in two ways: the subject can "aspire to an extended disposition over the conditions of action" (Meretz, 2017, p. 94) or "accept the existing conditions as a framework for action" (Meretz, 2017, p. 94). Accordingly, a distinction is made between generalized and restrictive agency.

A generalized agency strives for an expansion of the agency by changing the conditions of action, which is only possible together in cooperative association ("the assertion of general interests in the joint disposal of one's own living conditions against the ruling partial interests" Holzkamp, 1983, p. 373). This can also be understood in reference to a slogan of Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, in which the free development of each individual is the condition for the free development of all. However, this perspective of subjective action is associated with the risk of endangering the existing agency, since a rebellion against the existing relations of domination is necessary here, and there is also the possibility of failure (Holzkamp, 1983).

In contrast, restrictive agency involves securing the ability to act, accepting existing power relations and acting in one's own interests. Central to this perspective is an "individual- immediate satisfaction of needs" (Holzkamp, 1983, p. 2), in which "the opposition of different partial interests" (Holzkamp, 1983, p. 374), results in the subject asserting its interests at the expense of others. By attempting to maintain their agency through an arrangement within existing

power relations, the subject's renunciation of conditional disposition simultaneously contributes to the opposite result, namely: the subject actively participates in their own oppression and, in the long run, reduces the basis of its own capacity to act (Holzkamp, 1983). This contradiction, that by restrictively renouncing its own disposition of conditions in order to maintain its own agency, the subject endangers it in the long run by being at the mercy of existing power relations, is also called self-enmity (*Selbstfeindschaft*).

Thus, the subject has a double possibility to dispose of their living conditions: restrictively under recognition of the existing power relations for the immediate satisfaction of individual needs or generalized, in which the disposal of the living conditions is extended by joining forces with other subjects. From the external point of view, the two possibilities for agency cannot be judged for an individual subject; rather, they serve as terms of orientation in the discourse within which the subject is concerned.

Critical psychological perspectives on mental disorders

According to Holzkamp, agency has a decisive relevance for our well-being, "because agency is the most general framework quality of a human and humane existence, and non-agency is the most general quality of human misery of being at the mercy of circumstances, fear, bondage, and humiliation." (Holzkamp, 1983, p. 243). Significant here is the closer examination of the core contradiction of restrictive agency, since it "provides the categorical prerequisites for an adequate theoretical-actual-empirical grasp of all that is negotiated here today as *psychological difficulties, disorders, neuroses*, etc." (Holzkamp, 1983, p. 376).

Accordingly, this core contradiction or self-enmity is the cause of the development of psychological problems. All aspects of reality where the involvement of the subject in their own oppression and the rejection of the alternative to cooperate with others to extend their agency (restrictive agency) must, according to Holzkamp (1983), be repressed and denied.

At this point, the documents prepared by Ute Osterkamp (1976) to which Holzkamp's considerations tie in should also be mentioned. According to Osterkamp, conflicts arise through "threatening non-agency" (Osterkamp, 1976, p. 280), which she attributes not to the demands of the Id, as Freud does, but

by the lack of anticipation of the success of action in the attempt to abolish dependency relations through the extension of conscious influence on the general and thus individual conditions of life, or - as the other side of the same process - from the anticipated effects of the omission of actions subjectively recognized as possible and necessary on the individual existence and the existence of others affected by one's own behavior. (Osterkamp, 1976, p. 280)

This observation corresponds to the contradiction of restrictive agency. Osterkamp also introduces the role of emotionality, which is inherent in a critical readiness to act to expand the conditions of life, and which is normally repressed by means of defensive functions (cf. Freud). The formation of symptoms

represents the attempt to suppress "threatening cognitions [...], anxiety as an emotional reflection of the lack of direction in behavior, and helpless being at the mercy of others" (Osterkamp, 1976, p. 341) in order to make them manageable in random, current conditions of life.

Holzkamp and Osterkamp's view that restrictive agency and self-enmity are central to the development of psychological problems, and thus to "every subjective life problem" (Holzkamp, 1983, p. 376) should certainly be critically observed. Markard (2009) argues that it is quite possible for people to come to terms with conditions in a psychologically healthy way or to fall into despair in the common struggle for a better society, and that it is therefore questionable whether Holzkamp's considerations are empirically tenable (Markard, 2009, p. 193). As an example, a person is cited here who, in the struggle against the rulers, has been banned from his profession and consequently becomes depressed. To elaborate on this Küpper (2016) points out that direct or structural violence can also be the cause of psychological problems, in which no arrangement with the rulers can be assumed, but rather the recognition of these conditions is forced upon them. Küpper (2016) then explains an extended view of Holzkamp/Osterkamp's basic conception: psychological suffering is closely linked to the restriction or obstruction of subjective satisfaction of needs. In violent situations, a resolution toward dispositional expansion would either fail, be immediately impossible or loaded with too much risk, or not be suggested, targeted, or structurally prevented. If there are no possibilities to overcome these limitations of agency, if the accessible options are limited to a minimum, and if those affected by structural violence are systematically cut off from far-reaching social participation opportunities, it is necessary to seek other ways of dealing with the experiences of violence, limitation, and exclusion. Küpper (2016) describes this phenomenon with the concept of *psychization*, whereby the subject creates possibilities for action to cope with problems in the social close-range or in their own inner self, since they are cut off in their life possibilities by situational or structural restriction. This can sometimes lead to "far-reaching mental distortions, displacements, helpless impulses to act, and emotional borderline states" (Küpper, 2016, p. 58). As an example, Küpper cites, among other things, compulsive acts, which can be understood as "automated substitute actions in overwhelming and threatening situations in order to indirectly gain control over slipping living conditions and associated anxieties" (Küpper, 2016, p. 59). The goal here is the creation of security in the subjective experience, which does not exist in reality.

Agency in case of traumatization

I will now elaborate on the extent to which the previous remarks on agency can be applied to traumatic experiences. A traumatic experience is a violent situation in which a rapid response and action by the affected subject are required, while at the same time the scope for action is massively curtailed and restricted (Pedersen, 2019). That the need for safety, for physical and psychological integrity, is

extremely limited and curtailed here is undeniable, and the subject is unable to fulfill this need in reality due to the situation experienced as an acute threat. To what extent are the core symptoms of PTSD, i.e. intrusions, avoidance behavior and hyperarousal in the sense of Küpper's (2016) psychization understandable as substitute actions and avoidance mechanisms for coping with problems in the social close or psychological interior?

At this point, I would like to point out again that for an understanding according to the subject-scientific approach, one should assume a first-person point of view, and the following explanations should only represent possible starting points to make the specific "symptoms" understandable. It is striking that the symptoms are seemingly not in harmony, but rather in opposition. This could be due to the fact that a traumatic experience leads to splits, so that the affected subject tries to fulfill several contrary needs at the same time: on the one hand the need for security, which the avoidance behavior tries to meet. By avoiding places, people, smells, aspects related to the traumatic situation, supposedly safer situations tend to be sought out. Constant re-experiencing or hyperarousal, on the other hand, could follow the need to have actively defended oneself in the past situation or to react and be prepared differently in future situations. Pedersen (2019) interprets a repeated replaying in the mind of the affected person, which can be associated with feelings of shame or guilt for outsiders, with personal attempts of the affected person to deal with the experience and to actively learn from it.

In my opinion, a central element in the development of psychological problems is that the possibility to expand agency in the sense of the generalized agency is experienced as limited. Here, the association with others would lead to a change in the conditions that have only allowed such a situation to arise and the security of the subject to be curtailed. Holzkamp's thesis that the psychological state of mind is closely linked to the disposal of objective conditions of life can be applied again here. The subject who has experienced the traumatic situation suffers not only from the experienced psychological and physical violence, but also from the conditions that made such an act or circumstance possible in the first place and from the perspective that it can happen again. The experience of being at the mercy of others and of fear is not satisfied by the fact that the subject subsequently finds themselves in a safe situation, but they must be heard and acknowledged for what they have experienced and must themselves have an influence on not getting into such an extreme loss of control again. How this can differ between a *man-made* and a *natural disaster*, I will explain in the following section.

Agency in man-made and natural disasters

In July 2021, very heavy rainfall led to a catastrophic flood of the Ahr River in Germany. The extreme rise of the river Ahr's water levels as well as that of other smaller rivers, led to immense flooding. This event received significant media attention. Herman (2003) states that it is easier to feel sympathy for those

affected by natural disasters and events of force majeure. A large number of donations were acquired and volunteers from all over Germany traveled to the area to support the cleanup efforts. Local residents reported immense solidarity and support, in which social differences seemed secondary as every helping hand was needed. Kaniasty und Norris (2004) refer to this period as "heroic post-crisis benevolence," which leads to great mobilization and social support. This can be understood as a healing period that follows the experience of acute threat and disempowerment during the flood. This period of collective cleanup and solidarity has elements of Holzkamp's generalized agency. Here, the focus is not on individual needs, but rather the joining together of all participants leads to the improvement of everyone's subjective quality of life. Based on Holzkamp's conception of the social nature of human beings (Holzkamp, 1987), affected subjects perceive that their respective experiences have a place in the collective, that the community catches and supports them, and that they can recover from states of helplessness, meaninglessness, guilt, shame, and isolation. However, because this usually only lasts for a short time, social support drops again (Kaniasty & Norris, 2004), which can be explained in part by the overload of support systems and the saturation of networks. Social differences, marginalization and privilege can also become more pronounced again, and those affected also report resignation due to the fact that state's financial assistance has still not been paid out and they feel abandoned.

In contrast, reactions to *man-made disasters* such as rape can be quite different. This becomes clear in the revision of a verdict of the Basel Court of Appeals in August 2021, which reduced the sentence of an already convicted rapist due to a "complicity" of the woman concerned, since she had consensual sex with another man before the crime (statement of the judge: "One must conclude that she was playing with fire"). Here it becomes clear how not only the psychological and psychic violence emanating from the perpetrator influences the affected woman, but also the patriarchal violence, sexist prejudices and rape myths that deny the experiences of the affected woman, and even blame her for the act of violence. At this point, the concept of *spirals of disempowerment* by Pedersen und Stormhøj (2019) should be mentioned. In their study with victims of sexual assault, they report subsequent difficulties resulting from this experience. For example, women report subsequent financial losses and dependencies, a reduction in freedom of movement, isolation, absence of institutional acknowledgements of the act, feelings of guilt and shame while denying these from the outside ("What were you wearing?" vs. "It's not your fault!"). These specific disempowering experiences are interwoven and thus form a spiral of experiences of disempowerment, which play a central role in the traumatic process. In this context, the consideration of gender-specific constellations is indispensable in order to understand the problematics of those affected in a contextualized way.

When considering the situation of refugees, who have sometimes experienced sexualized violence in the context of war or displacement, it becomes clear how an insecure residence status, marginalization and experiences of racism further contribute to the suffering of victims. Trafficked persons are not

only confronted with the immediate psychological and physical consequences after an act of sexualized violence, but also suffer significantly from the social consequences (Nesterko & Glaesmer, 2020).

In an interview conducted as part of my master's thesis, a treatment provider reported that, from her perspective, it was not the act of rape that was significant for many of those affected, but much more the subsequent feeling of being ostracized from the community. This can be understood within the concept of "Ethical Loneliness" by Stauffer (2015) which describes the experience of being abandoned by humanity, compounded by the cruelty of wrongs not being acknowledged. Recognition and support for affected persons is lacking, their experiences are partially negated, and they are exposed to institutional and societal stigmatization, which leads to a perpetuation of their isolation (Nesterko & Glaesmer, 2020). Exclusion from the community can be additionally painful for the subject, as it also reduces the perceived opportunity to dispose of conditions and negates the possibility for generalized agency. Here, exclusion from participation in social provision can occur directly through social ostracism, being cast out of the family/community, or through denial of support, or more indirectly through negation and tabooing of the experience or silencing of those affected. This should be viewed intersectionally and therefore marginalization by gender, age, education, class, disability and ethnicity can compound the effects. The frequent response of the environment with solidarity to natural disasters tends to keep the reference and possibility of generalized agency for the subject.

From a critical psychological perspective, it must be noted that the differentiation between "man-made" and "natural" disasters must be viewed critically. On the one hand, this does not follow the perspective of the subject's point of view, but is rather derived from the outside by the supposed causal connections of the traumatic situation. On the other hand, this view follows a juxtaposition of nature and sociality of the human being, which is vehemently rejected by Holzkamp and the critical-psychological approach. Against the background that the flood catastrophe at the Ahr, just like many other catastrophes of this and similar kind, are to be seen as consequences of the present capitalist-industrial mode of production and the climate change triggered by it (World Weather Attribution, 2021), the division into "man-made" and "natural" disasters is fundamentally questioned. Even if the division is baseless, it is fruitful for understanding the different response of the social environment to the two types of disasters. It also raises the question of whether the contradiction of restrictive agency, in which one's own contribution to climate change is often repressed and denied by the subject through the support and maintenance of the conditions that contribute to it, is playing out here once again.

Conclusion

Traumatic processes of subjects with concrete experiences of natural or man-made disasters are neither comparable to each other nor understandable without the addition of the subject's point of view. The aim of this article and the analysis

of the division between man-made and natural disasters is to show that the consideration of generalized agency, and thus the disabling of subjects to participate in social provision and the exclusion from the possibility of expanding one's own agency in association with others is a central moment in the traumatic experience. Holzkamp and Osterkamp's focus on restrictive agency in the development of psychological difficulties is extended to generalized agency. This makes it clear that traumatic processes are not determined solely by the trigger situation and the individual, but are above all significantly embedded in and shaped by society. This also implies a responsibility on the part of society toward those affected, which must be aimed at restoring their agency. In a society in which patriarchal structures have been pushed back, how could the court case in Basel have proceeded? What is the likelihood that the crime itself could have taken place at all? What would support for the residents of the Ahr have looked like if their motivation also included complicity in the flood disaster itself?

This article does not claim to cover all aspects of traumatization in their entirety and to explain them in the context of Critical Psychology. Thus, some aspects remain open and need to be further considered. It is questionable, for example, how the aspect of symbolization or meaning that victims attribute to the crime can be included here. It is also unclear how a delayed trauma reaction with a latency period between traumatic experience (usually in childhood) and development of psychological difficulties can be embedded in the conceptualization. Also, this article aims to provide an initial starting point to explore how generalized agency using the example of trauma can lead to a better understanding of psychological distress experiences. The question as to how this can be applied to other psychological problems or "disorders" requires further thought.

The addition of generalized agency to the understanding of the suffering of victims in traumatic experiences makes societal demands for dealing with victims. But can implications also be applied to psychotherapeutic practice? What emerges is that effective support for those affected cannot lie solely within the framework of strengthening individual coping strategies for adapting to prevailing conditions and must not be limited exclusively to supposed areas that can be influenced by the individual. For this transfigures the possibility of the subject to be able to influence the conditions. Therapists need a political attitude that understands the suffering of individuals in their social embeddedness and therefore recognizes that effective support for those affected goes hand in hand with social change. This should be a political stance where solidarity does not get stuck in proclamations, but rather ends in a collective fight to dissolve violent structures that limit agency. In addition to these more theoretical considerations, we need further practical approaches that illustrate what critical-psychological psychotherapy can look like in concrete terms. However, the critical-psychological perspective also makes clear that the responsibility for reducing the suffering of people with mental health problems and supporting them in expanding their agency is not borne by therapists alone but must be addressed collectively.

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Everyday politics of educational psychologists

Maja Røn-Larsen

Abstract

This article contributes to theoretical discussions on politics of everyday life as a concept that enables greater understanding of the dialectical and transformational subject-structure relationship in order to grasp – theoretically, empirically and practically – otherwise hidden and poorly articulated political dimensions of our everyday practices. An analysis of the participation of educational psychologists in collective processes of reproduction and transformation of structural problems related to inequality, marginalisation and categorisation of individuals, as well as other problematics related to the contradictory societal matter of education, illustrate development of the theoretical concept of politics of everyday life. Educational psychologists play a significant role in the conflictual and contradictory processes in the field of education in a Danish context. By analysing the conduct of everyday work life by psychologists in schools, in addition to the collaboration, negotiation and conflicts that occur among various parties, the article attempts to understand their active participation as transformative political contributions to the development of the school and conditions for the educational system. Using a theoretical framework that involves a critical psychological, social practice perspective, everyday politics is analysed as a central and inherent aspect of the conduct of everyday life.

Keywords

conduct of everyday life, corridor casework, educational psychology, everyday politics, politics of everyday life, situated inequality, black box of inequality

Introduction

This article contributes to the theoretical debate on how to develop the concept of politics from the perspective of the social psychology of everyday life. By further developing the concept of everyday politics, the article addresses the transformation of institutional arrangements of conflictual societal matters (such as education) as dialectic subject-world relationships. Throughout the history of education, schools have been a battleground for political struggles between various parties with conflicting views on content, user groups and resources that address what education should be about and for whom. The field is characterised

by ongoing discussions about issues such as inequality, marginalization and individual categorisation, in addition to how to overcome these types of problems. Anchored in the micropolitics of education, sociologist Stephen Ball (2012) states: “I take schools, in common with virtually all other social organizations, to be arenas of struggle: to be riven with actual or potential conflict between members (...) I take it to be essential that if we are to understand the nature of schools as organizations, we must achieve some understanding of these conflicts” (p. 19). The question is: how can we explore and understand these conflicts, and what theoretical understanding of human agency and subject/world relations does an investigation of this nature require?

This article analyses conflicts in the field of education as everyday politics from the perspective of educational psychologists in a Danish context. I focus on their intentional engagements in the creation of relevant interventions in relation to school problems together with the other parties involved, and in relation to structural conditions related to mandatory legislative requirements and to professional expectations.

Historically, educational psychology has been associated with schools as a sorting mechanism, where psychologists assess children to determine who is fit to attend school and who needs special educational support (e.g. Mehan et al., 1986). Thus, educational psychologists play a central role in the conflictual processes in the field of education as gatekeepers to special education resources. Moreover, in recent decades, educational psychology has expanded to cover a wider range of tasks directed at schools, such as consultancy and supervision for teachers and other pedagogical staff, as well as facilitating multi-agential conflictual processes within and around schools and daycare centres across general and special education. Currently, these other tasks are under pressure, and the tendency to attribute school problems to the individual psychological or biological disposition of the child or social family backgrounds seems prevalent (Farell et al., 2006; Graff et al., 2021; Szulevicz & Arnfred, 2022; Szulevicz & Tanggaard, 2017). However, when we look at situated everyday life in schools, this tendency is not unequivocal; it is entangled and challenged in complex and contradictory social practices.

To understand and learn from this, we need to look more closely at the local, situated processes of collaboration, negotiation and conflicts in schools. We need to overcome the tendency to focus on recurring problems as concerning issues regarding either blind reproduction of structural inequalities or as a result of the insufficient professionalism and standards of psychologists understood as neutral experts. This article examines how theoretical discussions on the concept of politics of everyday life can enhance our understanding of the practice of educational psychologists in order to overcome the often-deadlocked theoretical struggle between structural determinism and utopic professional standards.

The work that educational psychologists do can be seen as immanently political, anchored in the intention to create meaningful and relevant opportunities for all children to participate in the educational system with others. An opinion piece published in a large Danish newspaper written by two educational psychologists (Mølgaard & Jensen, 2022) and signed by more than a

thousand psychologists illustrates this. Referring to the increasing inability of children and youth to thrive in daycare and at school in a still more financially pressed pedagogical practice, they state:

As psychologists we have become caretakers of a house where the roof is on fire, there is water in the basement, mould in the walls and a dead body on the first floor. At this point, the best we can do is to help limit the damage.

If the entire field [of education and childcare], both general and specialised had better conditions, educational psychologists could actually make a real impact in children's daily lives. We could do what is both professionally meaningful and ethically justifiable: supporting a good life for the child through preventive interventions in collaboration with management and staff in day-care facilities and schools as well as with parents.

However, we are currently under pressure to spend a significant amount of our workday on written assessments of children facing social, emotional and academic emergencies. This is happening despite our knowledge that it means that we make the least difference for a large group of children and young people who are not thriving when we work behind a desk. (Mølgaard & Jensen, 2022 – my translation)

In this article, I suggest that political aspects of the work that educational psychologists do are not limited to contributions to the public debate, however convincing they may be. The politics of educational psychologists are an integral aspect of their everyday work life in terms of the problems children and youth face. They do politics inside the burning house every day. To understand and develop concepts for the conflictual societal matter of education and schools, we need to examine the everyday political concerns and everyday practices of educational psychologists.

The theoretical framework for this study is a critical psychological social practice perspective (Dreier, 2008a; 2008b; Lave, 2019; Schraube & Højholt, 2016). Drawing on this tradition, politics of everyday life can be conceptualised as central and inherent aspects of the conduct of everyday life, where subjects in assorted positions and with a variety of engagements participate in a common matter in relation to contradictory historical, structural and institutional conditions (Holzkamp, 2013; Højholt & Kousholt, 2020; Højholt & Røn-Larsen, 2021; Schraube & Højholt, 2019; Stetsenko, 2008; Stetsenko & Arievidt, 2004; Røn-Larsen, 2019). The point is that conducting everyday life together entails actively relating politically and responding to the world (i.e. the school) and its transformation.

These theoretical stepstones form the basis of understanding the work of educational psychologists as everyday political activities related to contradictory matters of the school as a historical practice in a struggle field. This conceptualisation of educational psychology emphasises how the everyday work life of educational psychologists inevitably involves continuous personal and collective process of interpretation and experimentation in relation to complying with, maintaining and transforming the often-contradictory institutional conditions and demands related to the school life of children. In light of this, the

situated actions of the psychologists are understood as both constrained by and transformative of certain institutional and structural conditions for working with the difficulties children have within the organisation of the school. These processes, which I term corridor casework (Røn-Larsen, 2019), are inherently political since they evolve from a positioned engagement in a common, conflictual matter ultimately involving reflections on and negotiations of what school life is and should be for all children.

In the following I outline the concept of politics of everyday life and its current relevance to the practice of educational psychologists. I will then illustrate these processes with examples from my research, contextualised by aspects of the historical struggle field around educational psychology. I draw on empirical material from projects examining the practices of educational psychologists through participatory observations, interviews and documents from various municipalities in Denmark. Finally, I consider the implications of politics of everyday life for understandings of (inter-)professional work and action in institutional arrangements and for the further development of theoretical understandings of concepts like politics and conduct of everyday life.

Politics of everyday life

Politics of everyday life can be conceptualised as an aspect of subject's conduct of everyday life directed at collective negotiation and the transformation of common life conditions. This perspective is anchored in cultural historical research traditions emphasising the dialectical relationship of the individual and the social – more specifically drawing on the German-Danish tradition of critical psychology (Dreier, 1997; 2008b; 2011; Holzkamp, 2013; Schraube & Højholt, 2016; 2019), Jean Lave's (2011; 2019) practice theory and Anna Stetsenko's (2008; 2013; 2017) transformative activist stance. These interrelated approaches share an interest in human practice as inherently political in the sense that people participate with engagements in the world – and through this participation dialectically transform themselves, their possibilities and the conditions of the world they inhabit.

Understanding that people lead their lives in and across various societal arrangements, Klaus Holzkamp (2013; 2016) originally suggested conduct of everyday life as a concept for addressing the complexity of everyday life and how persons pursue a variation of different concerns across a plurality of contexts and together with others (Dreier, 2008; Holzkamp, 2013; 2016). In relation to the complexity of everyday life, people need to conduct their lives to navigate and get things done that need to be done and are important to them (Dreier, 2011; Kousholt, 2016). Ole Dreier (1999; 2008b) continues this line of thinking into discussions on the participation of subjects and their personal conduct of everyday life across institutional arrangements. With this concept, he goes beyond the understanding of structural conditions as abstract determinants of subjective agency. Instead, he underlines conditions as produced and reproduced in conflictual processes of collaboration between subjects acting with

different interests developed in their trajectories of participation across a variety of contexts affected by, for example institutional divisions, divisions of labour, legislation, administration and professional requirements and standards (Dreier 2006; 2008a; 2008b). Sociologist Dorothy Smith (2005; 2006) has been an important source of inspiration in this regard in terms of how to organise research and its analysis of structure/institution while avoiding the risk of adopting a mechanistic understanding of structure and subject, just as she suggests that an analysis must always begin based on the specific *work* that people do together and the multiple conditions that affect this work.

Hence, the personal conduct of everyday life is also always collective, i.e. people's engagements and activities form conditions for other (Chimirri, 2013; Højholt & Røn-Larsen, 2015; Nielsen, 2013; Røn-Larsen & Stanek, 2015). Furthermore, through their daily activities people are also engaged in transforming and reproducing the conditions of their common world as well as themselves. In this way, the concept of politics of everyday life attempts to extend the conceptual endeavour of conduct of everyday life in relation to understanding people's activities as both personal and societal – and as engaged in collective transformation of the social world.

The political aspects of human life have been a recurring motif in numerous scientific fields since the time of ancient Greece – with Aristotle's claim of human beings as political animals and societal beings whose nature is to enter into communities with other human beings, directed at changing it for the common good (e.g. Carriere, 2022; Hansen, 2013; Irwin & Fine, 1995). Still, from a variety of perspectives, it is widely disputed how to go about grasping the political aspects of human life, i.e. how to understand the relationship between public and private politics that eventually connect politics to the lived everyday life. In relation to these issues, feminist thinkers within psychology and sociology have pushed the limits between the public and private life spheres in an important direction (e.g. Smith, 2004). Psychologist Frigga Haug's (1992; 2016) discussions about politics and memory work highlight how we must analyse how we produce and reproduce the world and ourselves to transform the society we live in.

Hannah Arendt's 2005 book, *The promise of politics*, states: "At the centre of politics lies concern for the world (...) Wherever people come together, the world thrusts itself between them, and it is in this in-between space that all human affairs are conducted" (p. 106). The philosopher Toru Mori (2003) underscores the collectivity of political agency when discussing the political aspects of Arendt's concept of acting in concert. Politics relates to the process of people creating together, and political power is related to the plurality of the actions of various people (Mori, 2003). In continuation of this, psychologist Ernst Schraube (2024) describes politics as a worlding practice, the processes through which the reciprocal relationship between human communities and their societal conditions are developed (Schraube, 2024).

This resonates with Stetsenko's (2008; 2013) transformative activist stance, where people as subjects are always already situated in and directed at transforming the world into a better place (Røn-Larsen, 2019). Stetsenko unfolds

the theoretical base of Vygotsky's work, accentuating how subjects and the world are inseparable. People can be understood as neither a mere product of culture and social practices, as reacting or adapting to what is given in the world, nor as autonomous, free-floating agents creating or changing the world as something separate from themselves. Stetsenko (2013) insists that the individual is always inherently social and cultural, i.e. part of the world while simultaneously forming and carrying out future-oriented agendas that contribute to collaborative projects of social transformation.

Drawing on these diverse perspectives, I suggest that from the standpoint of each subject in the collective social practice, subjects are always engaged in the world in the making and processes of transformation towards a better future. In accordance with Schraube's interpretation of Arendt, one could say that the collective worlding practices of subjects are always already political.

Culture psychologist Carriere's (2022) book, *Psychology in policy – redefining politics through the individual*, explores the relationship between politics and people's daily lives by challenging the common perception of politics as a matter reserved for politicians. He points out political doings as a myriad of actions conducted by many different people happening more or less unnoticed, illustrating this by analysing the unrecognised *pre*-legislative work that the staff who support politicians conduct behind the scenes that is an inextricable part of the values and meaning-making processes of people's everyday lives: "...what matters is (...) understanding the process that occurs when the individual is engaging with policy in their daily life" (Carriere, 2022, p. xiii). His analysis of these processes as political, indicate how people forming the administrative foundation for politicians also play an important part in policymaking, just as he shows how their diverse perspectives and agendas play into political transformations. Taking his perspective a bit further and in accordance with Stetsenko and Schraube, I would note that the political processes of transformation continue in the conflictual everyday processes of people's collaborative *post*-legislative processes, i.e. in the policy processes through which the legal acts play into conflictual practices where people struggle and navigate together in relation to contradictory conditions and requirements.

In Lave's (2019) critique of the idea of concepts of standards as a neutral knowledge tool for settling or solving complex and contradictory problems – such as how to handle school problems – she stresses how contradictions, problems and dilemmas do not have definitive or stable solutions; they can always "only be resolved for now" (p. 156). Lave's assertion changes the perspective away from identifying the right professional procedures and standards for implementation once and for all and into an analytical investigation of how people are constantly participating in conflictual processes of (temporary) trouble solving.

In relation to the specific topic of this article, the categories and concepts professionals use to understand the difficulties of children must be understood as developed and negotiated among a variety of participants acting with common but also various interests and purposes, positioned in concrete collective institutional arrangements (Dreier, 2008b). Furthermore, according to Lave, the

analytical concern should focus on the everyday political contributions of educational psychologists to transforming the (school) world. Such a perspective sheds light on the practice of educational psychologists as an ongoing process that cannot be sufficiently understood by describing definitive legal requirements or procedural standards (see also Røn-Larsen, 2019; Røn-Larsen & Højholt, 2021). The contradictory demands that educational psychologists, as well as other participants, face in their everyday work life cannot be settled once and for all; they need to be explored and handled in a situated manner that differs, depending on changing conditions in the institutional arrangements. In this way, the politics of everyday life are not a definitive set of ideological standpoints but instead express ongoing processes of exploration of situated relevant possibilities entangled in complex and conflictual institutional conditions.

Politics of everyday life in the practice of educational psychologists

This section describes and explores key historical, contradictory relationships in the field of educational psychology and the school in Denmark to provide a steppingstone for the subsequent empirical analysis, which focuses on engagements and dilemmas in the practices educational psychologists employ to handle contradictory demands and to transcend managerial instrumentality. After the analysis, a discussion will be presented of their everyday politics in relation to develop relevant strategies in specific contradictory situations and, through this, to contribute to the maintenance and transformation of institutional conditions.

The ongoing historical struggle field around schools and educational psychologists in Denmark

The everyday political contributions of educational psychologists play into a historical struggle field of education, where many diverse, conflictual and sometimes contradictory perspectives are at stake in the collective processes of reproducing and transforming the institutional arrangement of the school.

The 1994 Salamanca Statement and Framework for Action on Special Needs Education issued by UNESCO marked the advent of an international effort to develop practices for inclusion and equal access to school for all children. This was also the case in Denmark. Since the beginning of this century, legislation on the Danish school system has centred on the aims of the Salamanca Statement. However, many attempts to fulfil the promise of universal inclusion have been inextricably linked to various approaches to the inner inadequacies and dispositions (e.g. diagnoses or handicaps) of the children or to their troubled family background, often resting on an understanding of intergenerational transmission from parents in a variety of vulnerable positions – either socially or economically. Scholarly analysis of historical practices concerning schooling in Denmark (and internationally) indicates that there is a preponderance of

individualising and decontextualising understandings of children and their difficulties within the educational field (e.g. Larsen et al., 2019; McDermott & Varenne, 1998). Multiple research perspectives draw attention to how understanding problems often seems to focus too heavily on either individual psychological and biological dispositions or on the intergenerational transmission of the child's family background, at the expense of more contextual matters within the institutional setting, such as the school (for an overview see, e.g. Røn-Larsen, 2011). Practice currently primarily focuses on early interventions and discovering problems before they arise, which again has led to a variety of preventive programmes, such as special education directed at specific diagnoses or parental training and compensatory programmes for specific groups of families and children (Juhl, 2023).

Inclusion goals can be identified in a diverse array of practices involving the institutional arrangement of educational policy – from national politics and legislation to local management and assorted interdisciplinary meetings involving a variety of professionals, to the specific classrooms and children's communities and parental involvement. Hence, multiple governmental resources are channelled into the attempt to create a more inclusive and equal educational system. However, these efforts have shown to be less effective than expected. In Denmark, the rate of diagnosis and resources spent on special education is increasing steadily but the educational system still struggles with inequality among children in various life situations (Karlson & Landersø, 2021).

Inequality in children's lives is typically explored related to family background and often understood in terms of social inheritance or intergenerational transmission (e.g. Barnes et al., 2012; Bird, 2007; Karlson & Landersø, 2021). A new perspective on inequality based on the social situations children face across their life contexts is supported by statistical research indicating that about half of children and young people in vulnerable positions in the education system come from homes that are not characterised by so-called risk factors (Benjaminsen et al., 2015). Other analyses show that more Danish children with a vulnerable social background surmount their social inheritance than children who reproduce it (Ejrnæs, 2003). In line with this, research suggests that social inheritance thinking often becomes dominant in the understandings of professionals, which in itself can limit expectations toward children, inhibiting their potential for development (Ejrnæs, 2007; 2019). Both research and educational practice indicate a need to open 'the black box of inequality' to study institutional processes, and everyday political processes, one might add, in addition to professional interactions that concretely affect the opportunities children have for participation in everyday life. Hence, there is a need to examine the processes of situated inequality (Højholt, 2016; 2022; Højholt & Røn-Larsen, 2021).

The conditions children have for participation, development and learning largely depend on their access to having a sense of belonging and social resources, such as interaction and cooperation with adults and other children (e.g. Højholt & Kousholt, 2018; 2020; Morin, 2019; Røn-Larsen, 2016; Stanek et al., 2021). However, children face unequal conditions for taking part in social

communities in their everyday lives in daycare, school, and leisure time institutions. These unequal conditions have an impact on their development, learning, well-being, and future opportunities.

As a result, professional contributions to the development of relevant participation opportunities for all children may represent a key lever in addressing inequality and well-being issues in children and young people's lives. Yet, in Denmark, children's communities and participation are rarely part of educational psychological assessments (EPA) or explicit problem-solving strategies designed to address key societal and personal challenges such as inequality, absenteeism, disadvantage, drop-out and learning disabilities (e.g. Røn-Larsen, 2011; 2016).

Accordingly, the tasks of educational psychologists have developed into new arenas, resulting in a wider focus on consultation methods, supervision and facilitation of inter-professional work. However, they are still positioned as gatekeepers in relation to the line between general and special education for children in need of special education more than nine hours a week. In this regard, educational psychologists are legally bound to conduct an EPA, which is the only mandatory "must-do" task they are required to do in Denmark (Graff et al., 2021). The Danish Ministry of Children and Education website states: "being referred to special education must be based on the individual pupil's educational needs" (BUVM, 2023 – my translation). The appeals board for complaints concerning special education also uses this criteria. Recent research indicates that psychologists spend most of their workday writing on statutory reports (Szulewicz & Arnfred, 2022), which the opinion piece quoted earlier also reflects.

Earlier studies of processes of professional work and decision making in relation to children in the border between general and special education point out that a gap exists between the knowledge presented in statutory reports about the school problems of children and what the children experience in terms of difficulties in their everyday lives (Røn-Larsen, 2011; 2016). The statutory reports and the EPA focus primarily on aspects within the child, at the expense of knowledge about the institutional context in which the child participates in its everyday life (Braden, 2017; Buck, 2015; Røn-Larsen 2018; Smyth, 2000; Szulewicz, 2021). In this way, knowledge on how opportunities for participation are constituted in everyday school life is left in the shadows. Although this knowledge is crucial in relation to understanding and helping the children, the EPAs and the processes of decision making tend to obscure this knowledge (Røn-Larsen, 2011; 2018). Combined, legislation on special education, economic scarcity and the requirement that the children's individual level of functioning must be accounted for in relation to prioritising resources establish conditions that seem to continually prompt educational psychologists to adopt an individualistic understanding of children's educational needs, despite of an explicit intention to do the opposite (Røn-Larsen, 2011; 2018; Røn-Larsen & Jørgensen, 2019).

The everyday politics of educational psychologists in organisational contexts

Educational psychologists and the psychological categories for children's difficulties have repeatedly been criticised for playing a key role in relation to individualisation and marginalisation. For decades, individual testing and categorisation anchored in educational psychology have been the target of criticism (e.g. Conoley & Gutkin, 1995; Mehan et al., 1986; Stetsenko, 2017). Many voices from both within and outside the field of educational psychology have discussed the need to further develop the tasks and positioning of educational psychologists in relation to the school, as well as their training and the overall institutional organisation of schools (e.g. Braden et al., 2001). A question that remains is how to understand this – and even more importantly – how to reach an understanding of how to change it. Often, we approach the quality of the work psychologists do with children having difficulties in school as a matter of following certain standards and procedures; however, when participant observations and interviews are conducted with the psychologists, other aspects enter the foreground.

According to Braden and his colleagues American school psychologists are generally locked into a reactive and individually centred focus, causing them to overlook the social aspects of children's everyday lives as an important aspect of school problems. From Braden et al.'s perspective, this dynamic relates to a strong professional history as well as insufficient training for educational psychologists that almost solely focuses on individual behaviour, learning and mental health, ignoring more comprehensive knowledge on, for example school culture and social processes within the school. Furthermore, they point to the organisation of school and the position of the psychologists within this organisation as contributing factors to this situation, stating: "Reconceptualising the role of the school psychologist requires more than just shifting how school psychologists enact their roles: It requires organizational changes in the ways schools and districts utilize and deploy psychologists in the schools" (Braden et al., 2001, p. 216).

This corresponds with the empirical findings in my research, where psychologists seem to struggle with restrictive institutional conditions in relation to gaining access to working with the children's social communities at recess. My empirical analysis draws on a variety of empirical material from practice research projects on psychological work in relation to children with difficulties, for example: participatory observations, interviews and documents from the everyday lives of the children, teachers and psychologists in and across general and special schools, including interdisciplinary meetings and processes of assessment, referral and decision-making (Røn-Larsen, 2011; 2019; Røn-Larsen & Jørgensen, 2018). The material was developed and explored together with psychologists from various local authorities to develop knowledge on their practice and politics of everyday life.

My examination of the everyday work life of educational psychologists shows how they are invested in much more comprehensive tasks that relate to investigating and changing the underlying social processes for creating relevant

opportunities for participation for all children in school. During interviews, the psychologists often explain why they do what they do as part of a common and conflictual social practice due to the institutional arrangement of prioritising school resources and addressing the overall political issues concerning what education should be about and for whom (Højholt & Røn-Larsen, 2021).

In this way, educational psychologists indirectly play a central role in relation to the various opportunities all children have to participate in the education system since they describe the children's problems as related to their individual level of functioning in statutory EPA reports. However, as we shall see in the forthcoming analysis, educational psychologists continuously struggle to overcome individualising and categorisations to create relevant opportunities for all children to participate. This work, which is often invisible in relation to their job description and the professional standards defined, tends to be confined to the in-between spaces of their everyday work life. During an interview, one psychologist describes how she believes that how the support system is organised causes it to fail to achieve its objectives:

I'm at a school where many children have social and relational difficulties, but the support system is mainly directed at academic difficulties inside the classroom. However, the difficulties of the children are primarily related to children's communities outside their lessons. (...) So, something in the way the support is organised plays a crucial part in how we can actually meet the children.

In a discussion with colleagues from other municipalities, another psychologist describes how the organisation is interchangeable with local conditions, that it cannot be understood as a definite framework or structure:

I'm concerned about the importance of how things are organised. What's possible and how does it work locally? What's possible in one collaborative relationship is impossible in another. What's possible is incredibly local. Both cooperation between child and youth workers and teachers, but also school management and cooperation between local authorities and all the people involved with your children. It's scary to think about how huge an impact the way we collaborate and the local underlying conditions have.

Thus, the organisational structure do not merely depend on overall policy procedures. The organisation or the institutional arrangement are related to the enactments of the various participants within the organisation, especially the psychologists. In the previous quote, the psychologist points to local differences – that the organisation is apparently not established once and for all. It unfolds in a variety of ways in numerous places according to a diverse array of collaborative relationships and negotiations. Moreover, the everyday politics of the various professionals affects these processes in relation to specific institutional conditions that work as a guideline or an institutional framework for decision making on the one hand but are widely dependent on local interpretations and variations on the other (Røn-Larsen, 2011; 2019; Højholt & Røn-Larsen, 2021).

In the empirical data, the psychologists describe how they work with contradictory demands in relation to the underlying processes of inequality and inclusion and exclusion. In one respect, they are expected to contribute broadly to processes of inclusion in school as a sounding board and as a mediator for children, parents, teachers, and principals in supporting the opportunities available for all pupils at school. In another respect, they are required to participate in individual assessments that sometimes lead to processes of exclusion that involve segregation into special education. As one psychologist explains:

We need to pay constant attention to the fact that there are so many different interests at stake at the same time – and so many vulnerabilities. And we need to be able to constantly explore and navigate in relation to these many expectations – to find the opportunities for development in every single situation.

The psychologists experience dilemmas related to conflicts between the demands of inclusion, social approaches to school problems and pressure of individualised problem understandings, which ultimately leads to restricted opportunities for participation for some children.

Many of the psychologist point out that their concrete possibilities depend on many more contextual relationships than the individual child's behaviour or level of functioning. They assert that, in each case, assessment and decision making often depend on other factors, such as a conflict-ridden interdisciplinary climate, a strong group of parents who insist on the exclusion of a single child, a frightened children's community struggling with the dynamics of exclusion when there is a change in teachers. According to the psychologists knowledge about these types of organisational complexities is necessary to navigate and collaborate in order to develop relevant interventions and opportunities for all children to participate. The psychologists describe their continuous exploration of and work with widely differing contradictory aspects as a central but often overlooked part of their work.

Facilitating interdisciplinary collaboration through corridor casework

Many psychologists describe collaboration with other parties as crucial to creating opportunities in the various situations. They explain how these collaborative processes involve what we have described elsewhere as corridor casework, to be able to participate in relevant ways connected to making a difference for the children and their families (Højholt & Røn-Larsen, 2021). This work consists of the many unnoticed processes of everyday work life related to making things work for children, families and various professionals (Røn-Larsen, 2019).

The psychologists mention how a central part of their work is related to the many conflictual relationships surrounding a single case or child and how they need to examine a problem's context and what is involved to facilitate relevant interventions. They highlight the need to address multiple processes besides the

mental processes of the individual child. The concept of corridor casework reflects an attempt to pinpoint these unheeded aspects of professional work, which often take place, for example as quick encounters in between meetings and test situations in the corridors or as phone calls in parking lots, and that are necessary for exploring and relating the many diverse and sometimes contradictory interests of the involved parties. These aspects do not appear in the descriptions of professional requirements and standards for psychological casework but they are essential to preparing and facilitating collaboration around complex and conflictual matters. Corridor casework requires exploration, flexibility and the courage to examine conflicts and relate perspectives in new ways.

Psychologists find it necessary to invest much time in building mutual trust and familiarity among the various participants to make things work. They talk about finding ways to be accessible as a part of the teacher's everyday work life by hanging out as much as possible in the teacher staff room or by talking to parents before and after difficult meetings to prepare or debrief them. As one psychologist explains: *"It kind of helps to develop a culture, a working community, where we continuously draw on each other"*.

Especially the head of school is described as a very central partner in terms of gaining access to preventive interventions in the classroom. The more experienced psychologists often advise newcomers to become acquainted with school management as quickly as possible (also noted by Graff, 2021) since *"That makes everything so much easier"*, also because the school leadership often acts as a gatekeeper in terms of the school's practices and as the one who requests EPAs. As one psychologist reiterates: *"The first thing you have to do is to build a relationship with the headmaster. To set the agenda and demonstrate how you can contribute. From there, you can start negotiating your access, position and possibilities."* In this way, the psychologists underline their mutual interdependence with other participants in practice. At the same time, however, they experience that this part of their job becomes invisible and unheeded, which means it is often the first aspect of their work that is neglected when they have a heavy workload.

From conflict escalation and lack of corridor casework to problem displacement

Corridor casework is at one and the same time described as highly complex and as constantly at risk of being deprioritised. Many of the psychologists describe it as risky since they are unable to continually maintain these in-between processes. At times the situation becomes so conflictual that the collaborating parties move further apart, rather than closer together, resulting in counterproductive consequences for the very children the collaboration is designed to help. As one of the psychologists points out:

Particularly in situations with a large amount of frustration, we often have different perceptions of how to handle the problem, and what is needed in the specific context. Then you often tend to think that someone else should have done something different. The harder it gets, the harder it seems for us to collaborate and work together. (...) I often think: 'Wow, here the organisation is pulling us away from each other instead of making us join forces to create a dense safety net'. For strange reasons, we withdraw from each other, and the parents and children fall through at their very worst.

Across the observations of procedures surrounding children in difficult situation, we notice a strong tendency for problem displacement to the individual child or the family background as related to broader deadlocked problems, where the parties end up in opposition. In other words, the escalating level of conflict and the feeling of powerlessness in a certain situation do not necessarily relate directly to a specifically low level of function in a specific child. Nevertheless, it sometimes leads to putting pressure on the educational psychologists to deliver individualising descriptions of a child to achieve replacement rather than the facilitation of the collaborative processes. One psychologist states:

When I'm invited into a process that has already gotten off track, and where there's a very high level of conflict, I'm met with a demand from the teacher: 'I want him out of here, and I want you to provide description that will make it happen.'

This psychologist touches on another feature, i.e. that these types of expectations toward psychologists are largely supported by special education legislation, which stipulates that EPAs are a mandatory part of the referral process (Graff et al., 2021). Although the psychologists are also in charge of processes related to inclusion and the facilitation of interdisciplinary collaboration within the general area, in deadlocked situations where there is a high degree of powerlessness, they are often under immense pressure to do individual assessments, making it increasingly hard to navigate between their various roles.

It's about different political agendas and perspectives on children. There's a conflict about whose psychologists we are. Who are we here for? Are we the school's psychologists or are we the child's advocate? And where do we place ourselves in that? What are we willing to stand up for? Why are we organised in this particular way and with what consequences?

Many of the psychologists describe restrictive options for conducting observations in the classroom before the level of conflict leads to an impasse, both because they feel pressured to conduct the mandatory assessments and tests in relation to emergency cases but also because other professionals have specific expectations toward their expertise on the individual child's difficulties and possible diagnosis. In this way, the expectations toward receiving certain contributions from the psychologists can also act to restrict the options available for analysing and working within the broader context of schools.

Mandatory reports – An EPA is not just an EPA

As described earlier, EPAs are legally a mandatory part of statutory reporting in relation to the allocation of special education resources of more than nine hours a week (UVM, 2023). This practice is an extreme case in relation to the expected “beforehand” and neutral expert knowledge (criticised by e.g. Edwards, 2010) but is simultaneously paradoxically illustrative of the dilemmas, possibilities and restrictions that educational psychologists face in relation to participating in a relevant way in a field with contradictory institutional conditions and requirements.

Several psychologists point out multiple strategies for bending the rules and creating possibilities in ways they sometimes feel are in spite of the planned procedures. They talk about the problems that arise due to the demand of following prefixed procedures and standards in relation to for example developing the statutory educational psychological assessment (EPA), or when they are limited to obtaining specific knowledge using specific standards and tests, no matter how relevant it might seem in the local situation. Such standards might restrict the opportunities available for adapting procedures and interventions to the concrete situations. They wish to determine what is relevant and when it is relevant to vary from process to process. What happens depends on the analysis of the concrete situation but the psychologists often feel that the analysis is restricted due to conflicting demands and a lack of time and flexibility.

In a discussion during a practice research meeting a group of educational psychologists discuss the strategic work behind an EPA:

I’ve sometimes been asked to do EPAs specifically because something was going to the appeals court. An EPA is not just an EPA. It’s written with a specific purpose and in relation to a specific recipient. There’s no specific conclusion, but there’s definitely a specific recipient and a specific focus.

One psychologist comments in a manner that emphasises the political aspects of doing what is supposed to be a neutral assessment of an individual in a statutory report:

You’re often commissioned to do a specific task, and it’s our job to keep that in mind. For example, I’m asked to deliver a progress report for the visitation council. There’s a specific request from whoever calls me in that we aim at a certain conclusion. So it always comes back to what I’ve been commissioned to do.

This leads us to considering how EPAs may appear as blind reproductions of the individualising positions when looking only at cases and EPA documents. However, empirical analyses of the educational psychologists overall practice point to the many considerations concerning how to navigate concretely to find the best possible paths to take by simultaneously complying with rules and breaking them.

What determines the content of the EPA? You have to think about the actual possibilities already when you decide what makes sense to write. Here political agendas will also play in (...) Inclusion changed the whole organisation of school, and as a consequence it has become relevant to write differently in your EPA because it can change the options that are available for what you can do.

So already in EPAs, the psychologists consider what possibilities the descriptions they write about a problem might open or close in relation to a specific child:

Our system puts a lot of emphasis on what has already been done in the school. You have to justify that an effort has already been made in relation to the problem. In the EPA, I turn the descriptions of these efforts up and down in relation to all sorts of other factors: the state of the teaching team, how collaborating with management is going – in relation to what skills and resources will be available for this child. There are so many aspects that affect what issues I choose to emphasise. I might exaggerate a minor effort that was made if I think it's crucial for a child to get support if they're going to succeed in that specific context. In that way, I really think that we have a great deal of power in terms of pushing our management in terms of the allocation of their resources. I use it [EPA] very deliberately.

As many of the psychologists above indicated, corridor casework requires working with their very position as a psychologist, expectations toward their interventions and with the constitution of problem understandings. The various statements from the psychologists clearly show that they put a great deal of effort into reflecting on and working with changing their position and expanding their possibilities for contributing and collaborating because they have found that doing so makes a difference in relation to what can be arranged for the children within the bounds of certain legislation. As one psychologist states:

Schools in a municipality with the exact same policy differ greatly, and this has a huge impact on the differences in the opportunities that children and their parents encounter.

The everyday political efforts and corridor casework done by not only the psychologists but all the involved parties make a difference in the situated practice together with other participants. They intentionally carry out the politics of everyday life in collective, complex, and contradictory contexts to negotiate, transform and make sense of the structural conditions in the institutional arrangements of education.

Toward an understanding of the everyday politics of educational psychologists

In my analysis of the educational work life, I see many attempts to expand the perspective from the individual child to a broader perspective on the many different participants and relationships influencing the conditions the children

have for participation. However, I also see this happening in spite of their working conditions. These conditions and the demands put on the psychologists seem to prompt the exact opposite of a wider view – due to the legal requirements regarding EPAs measuring the functional level of the individual child. In combination with limited financial resources in the general education, this seems to lead to a sense of powerlessness among the professionals surrounding the child, which ultimately leads to conflicts and a greater risk of exclusion.

The interviews with the educational psychologists and observations of their everyday work lives show that they put a great deal of effort into avoiding gridlocks. They reflect heavily on these situations resulting from the larger political environment and multiple local differences since they must constantly navigate everyday political work. The corridor casework they do shows that they are flexible in relation to following and bending rules and requirements, building alliances, preparing, and facilitating collaboration among various parties to develop interventions relevant to the children and their contexts. The burning house metaphor mentioned earlier is an apt representation of the professional and political engagement their efforts require. Furthermore, the analysis of the everyday work lives of educational psychologists shows that their practice of navigating in and contributing to transformation of the conditions delimits their efforts.

The aspects of educational psychological practice that take a strong political effort in everyday work life are often undescribed and rendered invisible, leaving it unrecognised. The historical and current conditions the psychologist operate in are restricted due to their traditionally contradictory role as gatekeepers for special educational support. The legislative requirements for EPAs on the individual child's level of functioning make it more difficult to do the necessary corridor work to change the conditions for the child to participate. These aspects of the work of educational psychologists tends to become obscured since engaging in this type of work is not delineated in the legislative requirements. This indicates that corridor work is not as highly valued as mandatory EPA task. As a logical consequence these aspects are largely overlooked and deprioritised.

To acknowledge and further understand how local efforts among educational psychologists and the restrictive conditions they endure contribute to not only transforming but also maintaining and reproducing the existing problems of inequality, individualism, and marginalisation, researchers must conceptually draw their efforts and corridor work into the light, especially if the goal is to develop better practices for inclusion and equal access to school for all children. We need to acknowledge their efforts in theory and practice as an important and inescapable part of working professionally with fundamental, common issues involving educational institutions.

In term of research, it is necessary to further develop concepts that address the work of educational psychologists and other professionals as related to the common and conflictual matter of expanding the access of all children to relevant possibilities for participating in educational institutions. Hence, it is also essential to embrace a new focus on educational psychology by expanding the traditional

focus of assessing and working on the functional level of the individual child in isolation to incorporate a new and broader perspective that centres on the educational psychologist's everyday political work on the context and conditions for the participation of every children. The concept of politics of everyday life can contribute to this new focus and implies transcending the traditional expert status of educational psychologists on the functional level of individual children and acknowledging the transformative collaborative activities of educational psychologists in relation to changing the concrete possibilities and institutional conditions. The theoretical development of everyday politics suggested in this article is not limited to the practice of educational psychologists and can be expanded to also support researchers and practitioners in terms of grasping the hidden political aspects of professional work in other complex societal organisations.

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Social character, sexuality, sexpol: The transgression of psychology by Marxist psychoanalysts

Peter Schulz

Abstract

Psychological treatment in general and psychotherapy in particular approaches the individual. In societal conditions that systematically produce physical and psychological suffering, it is therefore necessarily oriented toward adaptation to the demands of these social conditions. Sigmund Freud's concept of the normal, which is not normatively charged, but merely means the ability to function within the existing, emphasizes this.

In the 1920s, a small group of psychoanalysts tried to break through this limitation of psychology's focus on adaptation. They were convinced that Freud's psychoanalysis was compatible with Marx's critique of capitalism, and as socialists and communists they sought answers to the question of why the majority of the oppressed did not rebel against their oppression. On the one hand their attempt to combine the critique of capitalism and psychoanalysis proved fruitful: it led to the concept of the authoritarian personality. On the other hand, the attempt to politically lift clinical psychology in political practice came too late to slow down the rise of National Socialism in Germany.

This paper will present the attempts of the Marxist psychoanalysts Erich Fromm and Wilhelm Reich, as well as Siegfried Bernfeld and Otto Fenichel, in four steps: 1) it shows how the combination of psychoanalysis and Marxist theory led to the question of why the majority of the oppressed did not rebel. 2) it presents the extension of the psychoanalytic concept of character from pathological cases to the normal case as the basis for the development of the authoritarian personality. It shows how this theory focused on the role of sexuality in domination and oppression, offering for the first time a theory of the relationship between gender and capitalism. 3) it will discuss the programmatic point of an abolition of individual psychology through political practice concluded from this, especially by Reich.

The article thus aims 4) to recuperate the political core of the work of the Marxist psychoanalysts and to make it possible for a discussion in the light of changed social conditions during a new rise of political authoritarianism 100 years later.

Keywords

psychoanalytic social psychology, psychoanalysis, Freudomarxism, Critical Theory, political psychology, authoritarian personality, sexuality,

1. Introduction

It requires some explanation to study psychoanalysts like Wilhelm Reich, Otto Fenichel, Siegfried Bernfeld or Erich Fromm today, if one wants to explore the relationship between psychology and politics. Both psychoanalysis and the form of Marxism these authors embraced have been thoroughly criticized in the last 90 years - and societal conditions have changed more than superficially. Nevertheless, this article follows the intention that one can learn something from the efforts of the 'Marxist psychoanalysts': About the difficulties that the relationship between psychology and politics offers, and about the productive effects that a transcendence of mere psychology can or could have for theory and political practice. This assumption is grounded in the fact that Marxist psychoanalysts in their time, through their attempts to connect psychoanalysis and Marxism, came into opposition both to the psychoanalysis of their time as well as to Marxism and the prevailing political practice of the communist parties. Their attempted connection thereby ignited a dynamic for theory and practice as well as for psychology and politics.¹

The paper will reconstruct how this connection between Marxism and psychoanalysis was attempted. On the one hand, it will be shown how theoretically productive the connection was, and which practical approaches for the political change of the conditions stood alongside or in place of the individual therapy, in order to make it accessible for the present. To this end, I proceed in four steps in the paper: In the following section, I present the conceptual foundations of the connection between Marxism and psychoanalysis. This connection between psychoanalysis and Marxist theory led to the question why the majority of the oppressed do not rebel. In the third section, I then provide a reconstruction of how this linkage was theoretically productive. To this end, I elaborate the extension of the psychoanalytic concept of character from pathological cases to the normal case as the basis for the development of the authoritarian character. In addition, I reconstruct how the theory focused on the role of sexuality in domination and oppression and thereby offered for the first time a theory of the relationship between gender and capitalism. In the fourth section, I reconstruct the politically productive consequences of this connection, expressed in Reich's program of sexual-political enlightenment as a political *Aufhebung* of psychology. Finally, in the fifth section, I will discuss the reconstructed theoretical and political elements of Marxist psychoanalysis, consider its theoretical as well as political failure, and formulate theses regarding the potentials of the theories of Marxist psychoanalysts to be recuperated.

In order to achieve this goal, the paper follows the argumentation of the Marxist psychoanalysts without pointing out the critical revision of positions of psychoanalysis, Marxism or other underlying theories that has taken place in the

¹ The Marxist psychoanalysts were by no means the only ones who dared to try to connect Marxism and psychology. In the Soviet Union, a 'dialectical-materialistic psychology' and with it the activity theory around Alexei N. Leontiev and Lev S. Vygotsky was developing at the same time, as well as in West Germany in the 1970s, for example, Klaus Holzkamp's critical psychology.

last 90 years. The aim is thus to make their positions and theoretical movements comprehensible in a summarized way, in order to make them accessible to today's rescuing critique.

2. 'Why the Starving Man Does Not Steal and the Worker Does Not Go on Strike'

The term 'Marxist psychoanalyst' appeared as an oxymoron in the 1920s. In the first years after the Russian Revolution, it initially looked as if psychoanalysis might gain recognition as a materialist science in the young Soviet Union (Dahmer 1973: 276). By the end of the 1920s, however, the position of Abram Moiseyevich Deborin prevailed, which interpreted Freudian psychoanalysis as bourgeois and anti-Marxist 'Freudism' (Dahmer 1973: 285, Schneider 1973). On the other hand, although the psychoanalyst Paul Federn, in a 1919 publication, understood the Russian Revolution as a successful emancipation from authority, the majority of psychoanalysts rejected the workers' movement and communist parties (Dahmer 1973: 277).

Against the dominant positions on both sides, 'Freudomarxism' (Abl 2007: 128) or the 'Freudian Left' (Dahmer 1973: 9) emerged in the German-speaking world in the 1920s. Its main figures were Siegfried Bernfeld, Wilhelm Reich, Erich Fromm, and Otto Fenichel (Brunner et.al. 2013; Dahmer 1973: 9). Their starting point for combining Marxism and psychoanalysis was the question of why the international workers' movement failed in World War I and why the revolutions outside Russia collapsed, even though, in line with Lenin's and Rosa Luxemburg's theories of imperialism, the objective conditions had been ready for revolution (Reich 1980a: 1-2; Bernfeld 1973: 81). The answer to this question lays, in their perspective, in the answer to the question "why the 'ideology of the rulers,' i.e., bourgeois ideals and, particularly, the nationalism that obscured class relations, entered the (unconscious) emotional lives of the ruled" (Brunner et.al. 2013: 424).

Reich, Fenichel, and Bernfeld adopted this perspective because their psychoanalytic-therapeutic or pedagogical practice directly confronted them with the effects of capitalism on individuals' lives. All three studied in Vienna, came into contact with psychoanalysis there, and became psychoanalysts in the 1920s. The slightly younger Fromm studied sociology and became an analyst in Berlin, a place where all four worked in the meantime. Reich, in particular, encountered non-bourgeois patients as part of his work at the Vienna Psychoanalytic Polyclinic, and hence reflected on the class bias of Freudian psychoanalysis. This reflection led to the character theory, which will be discussed in the subsequent section.

At the center of their work was the question of why the majority of people, instead of rebelling, submit to conditions that are not to their advantage. The famous phrasing of this question, why the starving man does not steal and the worker does not go on strike, is found almost word by word in Reich (1980b: 34), Fromm (Fromm 1989a: 14), and Fenichel (1998a: 282), while Bernfeld

simply asks why the majority of the oppressed do not simply annihilate the oppressing minority (Bernfeld 1973: 68).

Other Marxist theorists, such as Georg Lukács and Karl Korsch, simultaneously addressed this question. Unlike them, however, the Marxist psychoanalysts did not refer to the fetish chapter of *Capital* and thus tried to renew Marxism. Instead, they adopted the dominant form of Marxism at the time, as it was also taught in the Soviet Union (Dahmer 1973: 309). They also did not connect Marxism and psychoanalysis internally – as Herbert Marcuse, for example, did later – but their "efforts to integrate Freudian insights into Marxism" (Brunner et.al. 2016: 424) remained external. They understood Freud's theory of man as a *Triebwesen* as a special theory for the psyche that had no effect on the theory of the capitalist mode of production (Fromm 1989b: 3). They conceived both theories as complementary dialectical materialist theories with different realms of concern (Reich 1972a: 8). However, their work is definitely an effort to integrate Marxist insights into Freudianism. In reference to Marx's theory of class rule and exploitation, they both historicized and localized the drive structure that Freud described as general-human.

Freud's psychoanalysis was for the Marxist psychoanalysts on the one hand their practical working basis and as such for them a critical theory. Psychoanalysis began with the thesis that hysteria and other clinical pictures were completely psychic syndromes. Freud opposed a biologization of this suffering and concluded that the distress-free discharge of affects was instead prevented by psychological reasons grounded in the life situation and upbringing (Freud 1957: 18). Thus, psychoanalysis took a step toward recognizing patients as subjects and replaced violent medical treatments with conversations. At the same time, it allowed a focus on social and family circumstances as a source of suffering.

Following the goal of individual treatment, however, psychoanalysis was (and is) radically a-normative. This becomes particularly clear in Freud's concept of the 'normal': normal for Freud is that which is adapted to society without suffering. Abnormal, and thus pathological, is that from which the individual suffers under the given societal conditions (Ipperciel 1998: 40-42). This definition commits psychoanalysis to individual therapy and presupposes societal conditions as given and unchangeable. Consequently, Marxist psychoanalysts opposed this definition. However, they did not do this against psychoanalysis, but rather within its framework. They followed the theory of the genesis of the individual psyche through the relationships in early childhood, but understood these early childhood relationships as the product of a historically specific form: the patriarchal nuclear family in class society. Taking Marxism as their point of departure, they grasped this form itself as the source of necessary suffering, and thus attempted to overcome the conformist orientation of psychoanalysis on its own ground.

At the same time, the Marxist psychoanalysts directed themselves against the conception of subjectivity as a mere derivation from economic conditions, which was dominant in Marxism in their time (Fenichel 1998a: 276). In contrast, through psychoanalysis they sought to understand the psyche of the human being

as the product of the individual's reflexive reference to societal conditions. They thereby supplemented Marx's productive 'toolmaker' with Freud's 'pleasure-seeker' (Dahmer 1973: 162) and saw both as grounded in human neediness. This essential neediness leads to productivity as a necessity of human existence in the first place (Fenichel 1998a: 278).

Marx understands man as a needy being, who produces his metabolism with nature in a division of labor. This necessary division of labor establishes man as a social being, who is therefore prone to social domination because he is dependent on other people. Under capitalism, man is expropriated from his productivity, and this expropriation also reverberates as alienation on man's subjectivity (Marx 1977: 68). Marx also portrays this alienation as a loss of sensuality, since under conditions of socially maintained scarcity, the world tends to be conceived only in terms of necessity. The dominant sense of man under capitalism thus becomes the sense of having (Marx 1977: 101), whereas what is actually human about man is that, according to Ludwig Feuerbach's (2014) example, unlike the caterpillar, he can comprehend the world universally and freely (Marx 1977: 74).

Just as for Marx, Freud's starting point is man's neediness. For Freud, too, man is dependent on social division of labor, which Freud calls 'culture' (Freud 1930: 49-50). Freud, however, adds to this anthropological assumption a theory of the socializational genesis of subjectivity, and places sexual drives alongside the drives of self-preservation considered by Marx. The specificity of these sexual drives is that they have to be socially satisfied, but their satisfaction is not necessary for survival. While Freud describes the self-preservation drives such as hunger or thirst as relatively rigid, the sexual drives can change the object from which they seek satisfaction more easily. A central thrust of Freud's psychoanalysis was that although the sex drives are usually coupled to the genitals as organs of their satisfaction, this is not yet the case at birth. Therefore, with psychoanalysis, desires and affects that are not directly sexual in character and content can also be analyzed as fed from the sexual drives.²

For Marxist psychoanalysts, this variability of the sex drives explains the gateway for social domination into human life. Social reproduction in the short term depends less on the realization of sexuality and other satisfactions of pleasure than on people eating and drinking. A state also depends on the sexual reproduction of its population, but unlike a strike against wage labor, a strike against this reproduction would not result in an immediate crisis of population policy. At the same time, the flexibility of sexual drives allows for their shaping in early childhood. This shaping takes place imprinted by the patriarchal nuclear family, by professional education, and by religion. All three authoritarian structures are, from the perspective of Marxist psychoanalysts, not models but images of social authority (Fromm 2020: 19).

² Freud developed several versions of his drive theory; in his last version he divided the drives into Eros and the death drive as two fundamentally opposing variants. Within psychoanalysis after Freud, the drive theory was not followed up seamlessly, and alternative models developed, for example, with Melanie Klein's object relations theory. The account given in this article serves to reconstruct the starting point of Marxist psychoanalysts who were Freudians on this point. For a critique of the abandonment of drive theory, see Herbert Marcuse (1961: 217ff.); for a critique of his position from the perspective of object relations theory, see Nancy J. Chodorow (1985).

This drive-theoretical theory of authority simultaneously opens up a perspective on the relationship between social domination and gender for Marxist psychoanalysts: in authoritarian structures, the child learns a repressive form of coexistence that is at the same time gendered. This is true for the patriarchal nuclear family as well as for its extension in professional education, but also for patriarchal monotheistic religions - the three main fields in which Marxist psychoanalysts criticize social domination. One's gender is understood as a factor in one's position in relations of domination and is accordingly significant: as a promise of participation in domination or as a naturalization of one's oppression.

Regarding their methodology, Marxist psychoanalysts understand both theories as dialectical materialism and present these commonalities in programmatic writings respectively.³ In the following, these methodological commonalities will be reconstructed briefly according to Fenichel's (1998) account: Fenichel distinguishes Marxism and psychoanalysis from idealism and a false materialism (Fenichel 1998a: 276). Only the combination of both theories allows a complete materialism, since only in this way the psyche and the societal structure are understood as material and active (Fenichel 1998a: 277-278). Both Freudian psychoanalysis and Marxism not only describe their respective subject matters, but scientifically unfold them and their regularities. Both do not criticize morally, but expose reality through their analysis and work 'historically-genetically' for this purpose (Fenichel 1998a: 287). They show the present as something that has developed and is contradictory in itself. Psychoanalysis is thereby suited to investigate how ideologies anchor themselves psychologically and, in this way, complements Marxism, which lacked a theory of intrapsychic processes (Fenichel 1998a: 283). With that they offered the historically first attempt on a Marxist basis to jointly reflect on the conditions of social production and reproduction on both the individual and the societal level. By combining these two sides in this way, they capture the capitalistically shaped production of needs in a theoretically specific way, rather than merely naming it.

The Freudian concept of relatively variable and shapeable sexual drives opened up the possibility for Marxist psychoanalysts not merely to grasp the relationship between capitalism and needs in terms of the denial of material satisfaction and the expropriation of productive needs, but to formulate a more differentiated theory of formation, which for the first time complemented the concept of ideology intrapsychically. From this, the generalization of the concept of character from psychoanalysis and its transfer from the description of pathological cases to the description of social normality formed the basis of the answer as to why the exploited and dominated do not rebel: Because their (sexually based) needs have, by family and social upbringing, found their satisfaction in submission to domination and the substitute satisfaction in resentment against inferiors. Their connection of Marxism and psychoanalysis is thus based on the idea of a complementarity of the two theories, which cover

³ Bernfeld in a section of "Sisyphus or The Limits of Education" (Bernfeld 1973: 45ff.), Reich in "Dialektischer Materialismus und Psychoanalyse," Fromm in "Psychoanalyse und Soziologie" and "The Method and Function of an Analytical Social Psychology", and Fenichel in "Über die Psychoanalyse als Keim einer zukünftigen dialektisch-materialistischen Psychologie."

different subject realms. They then tried to theoretically catch up with the interaction of the two areas - society and the individual - primarily through an adaptation of psychoanalysis.

3. The normal character

The key theoretical innovation of Marxist psychoanalysts, resulting from the linking of Marxism and psychoanalysis, was the concept of the 'authoritarian character'. Its development and its core elements will be reconstructed in the next paragraphs. This concept and its close connection to the analysis of sexuality in the patriarchy formed the basis for the necessity of the political abolition of psychoanalysis, which was understood especially by Reich.

In psychoanalysis, the concept of character initially describes the form that a part of the psyche assumes in the course of socialization in order to be able to meet social requirements. The concept was developed in order to be able to capture certain behaviors of patients in the analysis. Reich and Fromm developed it into a category of social theory. They stated that every society shapes the psyche of its subjects in a functional way, i.e., favors a specific character that fits it (Reich 1997: 13). The basis for this was first the observation that the majority of people in interwar capitalism were brought up in authoritarian family structures and, in accordance with this upbringing, tend to be submissive also to social authorities out of fear of punishment and deprivation of affection (Fromm 2020, Reich 1972b: 225). This servility leads subjects to deny themselves the fulfillment of their needs when punishment might follow. As a substitute satisfaction for these unmet needs, they instead develop sadism against inferiors who are not protected by any social authority.

From this formative violence in socialization and the fear of its repetition, a psychological structure emerges which they first call 'sado-masochistic character', later 'authoritarian character'. It is more prevalent the more society demands renunciation and promotes misery (Fromm 2020: 43). According to Fromm, the authoritarian character is by no means irrevocably fixed in childhood. Rather, the identification of internalized paternal authority with social authority must be continuously reproduced in order to stabilize the authoritarian character (Fromm 2020: 12). This also requires the persistent ideological or overt threat of social violence mediated through fear, guilt, or hopelessness.

The basis for the violence of authoritarian family structures was thereby their patriarchal structure, or more precisely the crisis of patriarchy caused by industrial capitalism. „Fromm had discovered a certain and widely common ‚sado-masochist character structure‘ that he deemed the result of a patriarchal family with a father who tries to restore his authority, which has been delegitimized by his actual social powerlessness, by authoritarian behavior. The tormented children submit to the father, develop a rigid and punitive super-ego, and project their massive aggressions, once directed at the father, at outer enemies“ (Brunner et.al. 2013: 435) In the nuclear family, the man can repress and thus endure his social powerlessness by experiencing power over other

family members (Fromm 1989c: 197). Instead of rebelling against social domination, he is upwards masochistic, downwards sadistic, i.e. against wife, children and social marginal groups. For Marxist psychoanalysts, patriarchy thus forms the starting point and basis for the acceptance of class domination (Fromm 1970a). The authoritarian character is therefore, for the Marxist psychoanalysts, at the same time a masculine character. Their view thus remains, like Freud's, androcentric and they hardly say anything about the situation of women (Umrath 2019: 160).

Referring to the social anthropologists Johann Jakob Bachofen (whose historicization of patriarchy already played an important role for Friedrich Engels) and Bronisław Malinowski (Umrath 2019: 85-153), Reich and the other Marxist psychoanalysts explain the historical emergence of patriarchy as a result of the emergence and increased economic importance of dowry-gifts based on increased productive forces. According to Reich, the necessity of the regulated distribution of the historically new surplus product led to the possibility and necessity of heredity (Reich 1972c: 188). With it, the sexual exclusivity of marriage asserts itself among the owning and, at the same time, it establishes social differentiation into classes and thus social domination (Reich 1972c: 141). Thus, "sexual oppression" (Reich 1972c: 101) is rooted in paternal heredity and monogamous marriage and is intergenerationally mediated first through violence like genital mutilations (Reich 1972c: 168) and later through education. With monotheistic religions, this regulation of sexuality becomes generalized, and in the context of the development of bourgeois society, workers also increasingly adopt bourgeois norms of behavior for their private lives. According to Reich, the sexual oppression within nuclear family becomes "among the ruling class's key ideological resources in holding down the working population" (Reich 1972c: 101), since it and the authoritarian upbringing that accompanies it "requires children to obey their parents, and prepares for the later obedience of the adults to the authority of the state and capital by producing fear of authority in all individuals in society" (Reich 1972c: 245).

A repressive sexual morality accompanies the patriarchal family, since control over female sexuality and, by extension, control of (female) sexuality outside of marriage was key to ensuring an orderly heredity. According to Reich, in order to control sexual needs, particularly in women and adolescents, it is necessary that they be dampened. This dampening requires a persistent repression of sexual needs. At the same time, this sexually hostile sexual moral comes with the split between sexual sensuality and loving tenderness (Reich 1985: 139; Bernfeld 2010: 252), which is projected onto women as a split into "the harlot and the unattainable, idealized 'holy' woman" (Reich 1983a: 93, translated by the author). It results in a brutalization of (male hetero)sexuality that springs from the splitting of tenderness from sexuality as much as from shifted sadism (Reich 1980a: 143-144).

The authoritarian character is thus linked to patriarchy as a basic structure of modern societies. Therefore, Marxist psychoanalysts generalize the concept of character gradually, and in relation to their clinical, empirical observations: Initially still in the spirit of Freud, Reich uses the concept of character in the

early 1920s to describe clinical pictures (Reich 1983b: 150.; 1983c), but analyzes different characters as dominant in different class situations. He and Fromm eventually conclude that "every form of society [] has not only its own economic and political, but also its specific libidinous structure" (Fromm 1989d: 34, translated by the author). Society, by means of its educational structures, specifically shapes individuals, as it "creates for itself those characters it needs for its existence" (Reich 1997: 13, translated by the author). The concept of character is thus transformed from an instrument for the analysis and therapy of abnormal individuals to a concept of critique of a false normality. In this normality, the psyche of the majority of people was characterized by permanently unstable submission to authority, repression of sexual needs, in return necessary positive occupation of renunciations (social masochism), as well as a sadism against inferiors such as women, children, and outsiders.

4. If the normal case is the problem, therapy cannot be the solution.

The heart of their theory of the authoritarian character as the normal case is thus its education in family and society to submission to domination and exploitation and to a mental attachment to and dependence on domination. This attitude is achieved by a specific shaping of the sexual drives, which is accompanied by their weakening and dampening and at the same time by sexist violence. This led Marxist psychoanalysts to ask whether psychoanalysis could play a practical role in overcoming this character and its sources, domination and exploitation. Fromm and Reich rejected this. Fromm sees no possibility of a 'politico-social therapy' (Fromm 1989d: 35); instead, the change of economic conditions must be the starting point and the authoritarian character can only be overcome by a reasonable and planned regulation of social life (Fromm 2020: 57). Likewise, Reich assumes that only the end of its societal basis, i.e., the patriarchal family (Reich 1972a: 47), means the end of the authoritarian character. For both, the function of psychoanalysis for the workers' movement is to contribute to the enlightenment and destruction of ideology (Fromm 1989d: 36) and thus to reduce its repressive power. As such, it should increase the explosive power that (according to Reich and Fromm) libidinous needs inherently have (Fromm 1970b; Reich 1980a). Reich "started from the assumption of a natural 'sex-economy' and, celebrating genital sex, equated it with 'orgiastic potency.' He assumed that this sex-economy was repressed by present society with its hostility toward sexuality. Accordingly, his political-practical activism centered on the liberation of this self-regulation principle" (Brunner et.al. 2013: 425).

It was Reich who finally attempted a political *Aufhebung* of psychoanalysis practically and, in the essay 'Was ist Klassenbewusstsein?' published in 1934 under the pseudonym Ernst Parell, theoretically. The essay first ties in with Lenin in order to challenge him critically (Reich 1972d: 284). To this end, Reich introduces a differentiation by distinguishing between the class consciousness of the revolutionary leadership and that of the mass of workers (Reich 1972d: 289). Unlike this leadership, the class consciousness of ordinary workers is not

characterized by a theoretical penetration of societal conditions, but proceeds from everyday hardships (Reich 1972d: 288-289). Workers are initially interested not in questions of value theory but in their everyday needs, "in food, clothing, fashion, family relations, the possibility of sexual satisfaction in the narrowest sense, in sexual play and entertainment in a wider sense, such as the cinema, the theater, amusement arcades, parks and dance halls" (Reich 1972d: 290). Reich agrees with Lenin that these interests do not become revolutionary on their own, and therefore he also agrees that there is a need for some kind of vanguard with a leadership function. However, in contrast to Lenin and the communist party of his time, according to Reich, it is not discipline that needs to be taught to the workers. On the contrary, the basis for revolutionary consciousness and revolutionary deeds is everything that contains "a germ of rebellion" (Reich 1972d: 295). Reich therefore does not reject individual acts of rebellion, but understands them as the starting point of revolutionary practice. In this context, Reich centers sexual needs alongside immediate material needs and accordingly links "sexual inhibitions" (Reich 1972d: 297) to the inhibition of revolutionary sentiments in his theory. It is precisely in this field that he sees the task of the party, which on the one hand must "attach the masses to us by feeling" (Reich 1972d: 341), but on the other hand must break these inhibitions down rather than promote them.

Reich therefore criticizes every form of bonding that corresponds to authoritarian education: Soccer as well as the pub and workers' social clubs as gender-homogeneous places of male workers (Reich 1972d: 314), the wearing of uniforms and any cult of the leader (Reich 1972d: 302) as reproducing authoritarian symbolism.⁴ In addition, Reich calls for the practical critique of the patriarchal family and its violence over women and children (Reich 1972d: 313, 316) as part of party work.

For Reich, therefore, a key method of the avant-garde party was to be proletarian „sexual policy" (Reich 1980a: 157), that is, the political enlightenment and organization of sexual needs against their sexual moral inhibitions. In practice, Reich realized his "SexPol" in the early 1930s in the surroundings of the KPD, in the context of which educational brochures and a magazine were published, sexual-political demands were articulated, and discussion was sought especially with young workers. The goal of the "SexPol" was to "transform sexual rebellion [...] in a revolutionary way, to lead it further to proletarian sexual revolution" (Reich 1980b: 200, translated by the author)⁵ and

⁴ This was a minority position in the discussion at the time: not only the KPD practiced a leader cult around Ernst Thälmann, Bernfeld also advocated mass festivals, leaders, and the establishment of tradition as elements of his socialist mass pedagogy (Bernfeld 2016); likewise, Fromm refers positively to proletarian leaders (Fromm 1970b).

⁵ The editors of Reich's English translations wiped its communist perspectives „This rebellion inevitably takes pathological forms. It is a matter of recognizing the fact that it is healthy forces which try to break through in these pathological forms, and of guiding this rebellion into rational channels, to a sex-economic regulation. Here, too, the freedom of life is born out of the convulsions of life." (Reich 1980a: 121) The German original from 1933 sounds quite different: „Aber sie bleibt zunächst bürgerliche sexuelle Revolution, vor der mancher Revolutionär oft mit Recht flieht. Es gilt aber, sie revolutionär umzugestalten, zur proletarischen Sexualrevolution weiterzuführen, nicht anders wie sonst aus den Erschütterungen des bürgerlichen Lebens die Zukunft des Sozialismus geboren." (Reich 1980b: 200)

thus to make clear the incompatibility of uninhibited sexuality and capitalist society that Reich had presupposed. In contrast to Lenin, for Reich, revolutionary sentiment does not arise from the collectivization and disciplining of the factory, but from the rebellion against (sexual) disciplining, because the goal is not work, but the free development of each individual. For Reich, a completely different form of subjectivity is on the horizon. With the overcoming of capitalism and the patriarchal nuclear family, the Oedipus complex, central to psychoanalysis as a key moment of socialization, also disappears (Reich 1972a: 47; Fromm 1970b; Fenichel 1998b: 232-233), and with it the gender characters linked to it.

5. Failure and potentials of Marxist psychoanalysis

Following the theoretical and political impulses offered by the linking of Marxism and psychoanalysis in the 1920s and 1930s, which the article has reconstructed so far, the historical failure as well as the salvageable potentials of this attempt will now be discussed.

To attribute the failure of Reich's "SexPol" only to the victory of National Socialism in Germany is abbreviated. As early as 1932, the KPD restricted Reich's possibilities, stopped the distribution of brochures on sexual politics, and finally expelled Reich from the party in 1933 (Dahmer 1973: 400-401). At the same time, Reich was expelled from the International Psychoanalytic Association in 1934 because of his political activity. This was followed by a split between Reich and Fenichel over the question of an independent Marxist psychoanalytic organization (Dahmer 1973: 363).

Overall, the discussion context of Marxist psychoanalysis broke down as a result of the exile situation, but was reinforced by the loss of organizational platforms. Reich himself fled to Denmark, where his residence status was revoked in 1934 for political reasons. He fled further to Sweden, where he was also under public political pressure. This isolation, as well as the low hope of being able to therapeutically or politically counter the rise of National Socialism, can be seen as one of the reasons why Reich distanced himself from psychoanalysis and Marxism. From the mid-1930s, he advocated a vitalistic theory of healing, first with 'vegetotherapy' and later with 'orgonomy' (Dahmer 1973: 374), in which he attributed psychological suffering to energy flows that could not be scientifically proven. Reich was legally prosecuted for his orgonomy in the USA after the war, arrested and died in prison in 1957.

Fromm also turns away from Freudian psychoanalysis after his separation from the Institute for Social Research in 1938, to which he had belonged since 1930, and from 1941 on, he advocates a theory that is no longer based on the theory of drives, but on a theory of harmonious social coexistence (Fromm 1969: 26). Bernfeld worked in exile on a Freud biography and died in 1953; Fenichel continued his largely orthodox psychoanalytic work and organized contact between exiled psychoanalysts by circulating newsletters - he also died in the USA in 1946. Bernfeld and Fenichel worked on the preservation of the endangered psychoanalysis and suspended their Marxist positions for this

purpose, while Reich and Fromm left the ground of psychoanalysis. Remarkably, their respective starting points are complementary and already evident in their psychoanalytic works. Both first implicitly reject Freud's concept of sexuality: Reich narrows successful sexuality to a supposedly natural genitality in which other things have their place only as *Vorlust*; Fromm, on the other hand, expands it to human love and criticizes Freud's focus on sexuality (Fromm 1969). This development is already apparent in both of their works before their break with Freud. In Reich's case at the latest in 1927 in 'Die Funktion des Orgasmus' (The Function of Orgasm), in which he opposes a natural and wholesome genital sexuality to socially conditioned inhibitions or congestions (Reich 1985: 23). In Fromm's case, the turning away becomes apparent at the latest in 1932, when he criticizes the Freudian focus on erogenous zones in 'Psychoanalytic Characterology and its Relevance for Social Psychology' (Fromm 1970c). They both have in common that they focus on the repression of natural drives. Both are motivated by a focus on human nature as the foundation of their critique and at the same time as the foundation of revolutionary potential (Dahmer 1973: 404; Abl 2007: 131). Unlike the Freudian theory of drives, which in all its variants emphasizes the primary asociality of man and thus opposes a natural harmony of human nature and the social, both Reich and Fromm formulate theories that assume a natural harmony and explain the non-harmonious reality through social repression.

Coupled with this, Reich and Fromm have a restrictive notion of successful heterosexual sexuality as penetration of the vagina with a penis, which is based on the one hand on the pathologization of clitoral sexuality (Reich 1983a; Fromm 1989e: 8, 365) and on the other hand of homosexuality (Reich 1983d: 223; Fromm 2020: 10). They follow Freud's pathologizations and even exceed them, since they place against his a-normative concept of normality the normativity of social liberation and thus of the genital (hetero)sexuality of a liberated society. Furthermore, they display suggestively difference-feminist positions: Reich and Fromm criticize the women's movement of their time, countering it by arguing that feminist politics actually needed to develop positively occupied feminine qualities such as motherliness (Reich 1983c: 273; Fromm 1970a).

On the one hand, "[t]heir emphasis on social relations [] allowed them to come up against psychologisms and to conceptualize human thought and action as deeply historical" (Brunner et.al. 2013: 424), on the other hand, unlike Freud, they naturalized a sexuality they perceived as successful. With this "simple contradistinction between biological drive structure and social deformation, the basis for deviation and resistance needed to be sought after in the drives and when the critique of biologism was driven further it evolved into a rather idealistic recourse to ethics" (Brunner et.al. 2013: 424-425). Despite and also because of this failure, something can be learned from the attempts of Marxist psychoanalysts for current matters. In doing so, the preceding reconstruction hopefully makes clear that their attempt to transcend psychology politically reveals potentials both theoretically and politically: theoretically, it made clear the connection between psychic constitution (character in the vocabulary of Marxist psychoanalysis), gender, and social domination; politically, it made clear

the relevance of psychic interests for the politicization of the lifeworld. Moreover, it became clear that every political practice has to reflect its concept of liberation and its implicit (or explicit) naturalizations.

Four theses on these points will follow and conclude the paper: Firstly, for Marxist psychoanalysis, as presented, there was a close connection between the authoritarian character, patriarchy and its repressive sexual morality. Under the condition of "repressive desublimation" (Marcuse 2002: 59) and the observation of psychoanalytically oriented social scientists that the socially dominant character changes and is nowadays less oriented towards renunciations (Schulz 2020: 204-205), this thesis needs a revision. However, the concept of social character need not be discarded for this purpose, and the persistence of existing societal conditions in the very subjects themselves continues to require an explanation for which an updated concept of social character can provide a basis. At the same time, the role that masculinity, sexual oppression, and the authoritarian character play in contemporary political authoritarian movements is hard to overlook, whether in the phenomenon of incels and their linkage to U.S. Trumpism, or to anti-woman and anti-queer positions of right-wing actors around the world.

Secondly, Reich's critique of the communist party of his time was based on a key argument, namely the thesis that politicization must start from everyday experiences and subjective needs. The reference to Freud's drive theory allowed him to identify sexual needs in addition to the needs of life support, food, housing, and so on. The assumed high variability of sexual needs makes them a key battlefield for social domination. This is also reflected in the aforementioned identity and cultural-political struggles of right-wing movements. At the same time, it is evident from these authoritarian movements and their concepts of cultural political work, so-called meta-politics, that right-wing activists today grasp and in part successfully occupy Reich's approach of making 'cinema, the theater, amusement arcades, parks and dance halls' the starting point of political practice. The connection between acceptance of social domination and psychological needs, as elaborated by Marxist psychoanalysts, makes it clear that this 'metapolitics' is by no means a pre-political activity, but a direct attempt to reproduce the legitimacy of domination structures. Thirdly, Reich understood the basis of domination primarily as the suppression of a naturally invested sexuality. Accordingly, his concept of liberation consisted in the idea of breaking open the armor of character (Reich 1972). In the course of the revolts around 1968, the concepts of Marxist psychoanalysts were rediscovered. Fromm was read primarily in terms of the authoritarian character, Bernfeld primarily for his critique of professional pedagogy. Reich's writings, in particular, gained importance in inspiring specific concepts for collectively overcoming the authoritarian character. His ideas combined with concepts from other sources during the student movement: The sit-ins, which originated in the civil rights movement, were further developed by the American SDS into teach-ins, in which political action through blockade and political education work were directly linked. One step further was the concept of creating situations, which was developed by the Situationist International (SI) in France, and which was

mediated via the Munich action art group SPUR, which was for a time a member of the SI, to the German student movement and from there to the United States. The goal was to create political actions and spaces in which those involved could directly overcome their authoritarian character. The critique of this concept formulated as early as the 1930s, which pointed to the danger of accompanying psychological trauma (Fenichel 1998c: 333), was barely received in the 1960s and 1970s. Accordingly the dangers of targeted confrontations with the police as an educational technique, as in the German student movement or, for example, in the protests against the 1968 Democratic National Convention in Chicago, were reflected on just as little as those of the deprivatized practice of living together in the emerging communes. The theories of Marxist psychoanalysts - in their failure - thus form a mirror for the understanding of liberation and its own potential for violence.

Fourthly, the concept of mere liberation through the breaking of the armor based itself on a naturalization of an intrinsically good sexuality, which at the same time presupposed heterosexual genitality. This naturalization is by no means necessary in the combination of Marxism and psychoanalysis, as the renewed attempt at combination in the works of Herbert Marcuse shows. In 'Eros and Civilization' Marcuse reanalyzed the connection between gender character, sexuality and capitalism. The pivotal point of his theory is that the formation of genital sexuality is to be understood as a de-eroticization of the remaining body, which becomes necessary so that it can be instrumentally handled as a means of labor (Marcuse 1961: 45-46). Accordingly, unlike Reich, Marcuse's perspective on a subjectivity beyond capitalism is not the perspective on a liberated (heterosexual) genitality, but on a sexuality beyond genitality and the suspension of gender characters in "androgynism" (Marcuse 1974: 287). This also provided a starting point for the critique of the repression of homosexuality and a radical critique of gender and monosexuality in general, as formulated in the 1970s in the U.S. gay and lesbian movement (Altman 1993; Firestone 2015; Umrath 2019: 45), but also in Europe, for example by Mario Mieli (2018) building on Marcuse's theory. Looking at Marxist psychoanalysis therefore allows us to understand this naturalization as a failure that, once understood, enables us to reflect on our own theoretical and political positions.

These four tasks, sketched here merely as theses, by no means require the use of psychoanalytic (or Marxist) theories, although I suspect that their critical reading is useful. But a look at the history of psychology's attempts to cross over into politics, as attempted in this article using the example of Marxist psychoanalysts of the 1920s and 1930s, can serve as a lens for contemporary theoretical and political concepts-to learn from their failure rather than repeat it.

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“Only You”: Neoliberal responsibilizing through a public health campaign in the Norwegian welfare state

Salman Türken, Erik Carlquist & Joshua M. Phelps

Abstract

One of the pathways through which psychology may function as "politics by other means" is when scientific knowledge from the discipline is used to inform and influence the public on issues of health and well-being. To illustrate this point, we explore "Only You," a Norwegian public health campaign composed of psychoeducational videos and web resources and aimed to promote well-being in the general Norwegian population. By drawing upon critical psychological literature on agency, neoliberal subjectivity, responsibilizing and neurogovernance, we critically analyze promotional and instructional videos that explicitly targeted individual behavioral change. We demonstrate how these campaign videos appropriate psychological knowledge and conceal societal contexts in order to responsibilize subjects and thereby perpetuate neoliberal ideas and practices in the Norwegian welfare state. In this sense, they provide illustrations of how psychology can be a tool for restricting agency under the guise of encouraging autonomy.

Keywords

neoliberal subjectivity, psychologization, responsibilizing, neurologization, agency

Introduction

Today the function of psychiatry, psychology and psychoanalysis threatens to become the tool in the manipulation of men [sic]. (Fromm, 1955, p. 163-164)

In *The Sane Society*, Fromm (1955) raised a critique of psychologizing tendencies in Western capitalist societies, warning against the risk of psychology becoming a tool for manipulating the public and “the apologist for the status quo” (p. 71). In particular, he criticized the widespread understanding that “the problem of mental health in a society is only that of the number of ‘unadjusted’ individuals, and not that of a possible unadjustment of the culture itself” (Fromm,

1955, p. 6). Although Fromm's critique was directed at US capitalism and society in the 1950s, it is useful for interpreting how contemporary Western capitalist societies draw upon disciplinary psychology in order to understand and intervene in public mental health. Fromm maintained that an individual's ability or capacity to achieve mental health is never solely determined by individual factors. Instead, it relies largely upon what specific local and societal contexts enable or make possible. However, more contemporary critical psychological literature has problematized how increasing psychologization has contributed to obscure contextual factors and support neoliberal ideology (e.g., Arfken, 2018; Madsen & Brinkmann, 2011; Marvakis, 2019; Parker, 1999). In this paper, in light of critical psychological concepts such as subjectivity and agency, responsibilizing, and neoliberalism, we discuss elements of a Norwegian public health strategy aiming to improve mental health and well-being amongst citizens.

Norway has generally been recognized to be a well-functioning welfare state (UNDP, 2021-22) and has consistently ranked at the top of surveys comparing well-being across nations (e.g., Helliwell et al., 2022). Indeed, the Norwegian state has invested heavily in public mental health care and promotion during the last decades (Office of the Auditor General, 2021). The number of psychologists and the funds allocated to mental health services has increased considerably, and authorities have expanded low-threshold services by employing psychologists in local municipalities nationwide (Ose et al., 2018). Despite these efforts, self-reported mental health problems have increased during the past two decades, as have the seeking of professional psychological help and the use of psychotropic medications, both in youth and adult populations (Reneflot et al., 2018). Advocacy groups have therefore pointed to the need for further investments in prevention and treatment of mental health problems (e.g., Mental Helse, 2022).

In this paper, we explore the psychoeducational videos and web resources of the recent large-scale Norwegian governmental health campaign, "Bare Du" (Only You). This campaign drew upon psychological research and the notion of "five ways to well-being" (Aked et al., 2008; Prydz et al., 2022) and aimed to promote mental health and well-being amongst the general Norwegian population. We ask what kinds of subjectivities and forms of agency are offered or made possible to citizens through the "Only You" campaign, and how the campaign might have *responsibilized* individual subjects for their own mental health. Hence, we illustrate ways psychology works *as politics by other means*, allowing us to explore how psychological theory and practice may be used to the advantage of neoliberalism (Arfken, 2018).

Theoretical framework

Our theoretical framework emphasizes how neoliberalism may constitute and constrain subjectivity in societies such as Norway. We draw upon Holzkamp's (1991) distinction between restrictive and generalized agency, critical psychological perspectives on subjectivity, neoliberalism and the welfare state,

and the concept of responsabilizing (Lemke, 2001; Rose, 1996, 1999), including "governing through the brain" (Rose & Abi-Rached, 2014).

Neoliberal subjectivity and agency

Subjectivity emerges in relation to and exists through ongoing situated participation and conduct of everyday life, as continuously interwoven between the inner resources of individuals on the one hand, and external societal conditions on the other (Holzkamp, 1991; Parker, 1999; Teo, 2015). Societal meaning structures, such as neoliberal ideology, lay the foundation upon which individuals act, becoming premises of each person's subjective reasons for action. Mainstream psychology can be criticized for limiting these action possibilities, in that one major role of psychological science is to equip people with strategies for mentally adjusting to already existing inequality-generating and illness-producing conditions, rather than altering them (Holzkamp, 2013). In this paper, we explore how mental health campaigns which explicitly draw on mainstream psychological knowledge might stimulate, offer, and limit subjectivity and action possibilities. Human agency is ultimately always political, as our actions may maintain, reproduce, challenge or create alternative social relations (Marvakis, 2019). However, societal changes under neoliberalism have affected psychology in ways that demand a redefinition of its functionality for a new historical form of subjectivity (Arfken, 2018; Marvakis, 2019). The neoliberal form of subjectivity (Teo, 2018) entails that persons act on the premise that change is primarily possible in the sense of changing *oneself*, or one's immediate surroundings. Wider social and societal relations are taken as given or understood as undesirable or impossible to change. Starting from Holzkamp's (1991) distinction, we will explore whether and how the "Only You" campaign might stimulate a *restrictive agency*, where subjects are poised to pursue action within the confines of socially given possibilities and limitations, or in contrast might stimulate a *generalized agency* by which subjects transcend those limits and can control and change societal conditions.

Neoliberalism and the welfare state

Neoliberalism has radically reshaped the relationship between the individual and the state (Arfken, 2018). State bureaucracy has been increasingly transformed into business-like enterprises designed to move people off "entitlements" and into the labor force regardless of their individual circumstances, reproducing market relations (Esping-Andersen, 1990) and hence the capitalist system at large by ensuring that there is a supply of healthy, educated and disciplined workers for the economy (e.g., Gough, 1979; Moncrieff, 2022).

Neoliberalism does not imply a shrinking or weakened state, despite a number of functions having been privatized or outsourced. Rather, the state becomes a central instrument for the advancement of neoliberal agendas (e.g.,

Wacquant, 2012). As Davies (2018) argues, this involves a redistribution of power away from the conventional political and bureaucratic spheres, which are implicitly understood as corrupt. Instead, agency increasingly flows to actors viewed as unpolluted by politics. As a result, ‘non-political’ actors such as consultants, auditors, contractors, and experts perform a greater role in the functioning of the neoliberal state. Neoliberalism not only enables particular ways for society to be organized, but also demands that social scientists deliver expert knowledge in order to bring about necessary compliance within the population (Marvakis, 2019). As Arfken (2018, p. 4) argues, living in neoliberal societies implies being “transformed into a malleable and disposable appendage of advanced capitalism.” This implies that bureaucratic use of psychological knowledge or services may effectively serve to maintain the status quo of neoliberalism, since psychology may be used to bring about the required adjustments among individuals. Such scientification legitimizes the political will and activities of the bureaucracy and works to bring about compliance (Harding, 1992). The practical consequence of such dynamics is the proliferation of scientifically based programs, not “corrupted” by politics. Thus, when state agencies and bureaucracies initiate large-scale interventions such as public health campaigns, the content of such measures are based on allegedly neutral scientific, empirical knowledge (see Marvakis, 2019; Harding, 1992).

Responsibilizing in neoliberal societies

Critical social scientists have been concerned with how individuals in Western societies are increasingly understood to be responsible for their own health and well-being. For example, Crawford’s (1980) *healthism* concept critically refers to “the preoccupation with personal health as a primary – often the primary – focus for the definition and achievement of well-being ... (which) treats individual behavior, attitudes and emotions as the relevant symptoms needing attention” (p. 368). Similarly, resonating with Fromm’s (1955) warnings against psychologization in capitalist societies, it has been long recognized that psychotherapy has become an available answer to almost any crisis encountered in an individual’s life. Indeed, the language of therapy has increasingly infused popular media and self-help literature (Illouz, 2008; Madsen, 2015), and it is now commonly recognized amongst critical psychologists that neoliberal developments have led to profound changes in societal as well as individual health practices. Social, structural and political problems have been conveniently psychologized, and thus transformed into personal matters (De Vos, 2008; Madsen & Brinkmann, 2011), a development which has also been construed as a form of structural violence in critical health psychology (see e.g., Hodgetts & Stolte, 2017). Structural violence, to use Farmer’s (2004) understanding, refers to an indirect social machinery of oppression where the very structure of society systematically causes harm to or disadvantages individuals and groups. Adverse outcomes such as subjugation, psychological terror, stigmatization, illness and

death, stand at risk of being erased from the historical memory, and instead individuals can be praised or blamed for their suffering.

Illustratively, Rose (1996, 1999) argues that workings of neoliberalism are strengthened by the psy-complex, where psychology and its related disciplines diffuse in society a certain type of psychological knowledge and practical techniques of self-control, self-esteem, self-awareness etc. through which individuals understand and conduct themselves in ways consonant with neoliberalism. Crucially, individuals are molded (Teo, 2018) into self-monitoring subjects who employ those practices to improve and optimize themselves. Consequently, individuals are increasingly understood by the state and themselves as solely responsible for their own well-being and fate, for their successes and failures. Hence, they are required to accept responsibility for managing every sphere of life, and for tackling the risks and uncertainties created by changes in the structural elements of society. Indirect control by the state is enabled by responsabilizing individuals as agents who "would produce the ends of government by fulfilling themselves rather than being merely obedient" (Rose et al., 2006, p. 89). Neoliberalism reshapes subjectivity in such a manner that explanations of concerns or problems caused by external (societal) forces are ascribed to the self, with appeals to "personal responsibility" and "self-care" (Lemke, 2001, p. 203). Such neoliberal responsabilizing "respond[s] to the sufferer as if they were the author of their own misfortune...the disadvantaged individual has come to be seen as potentially and ideally an active agent in the fabrication of their own existence" (Rose, 1996, p. 59).

Welfare state retrenchment is enabled through the transformation of citizens into autonomous, self-steering, economically independent, responsibility-taking agents who must manage and develop themselves in order to survive and succeed in neoliberal societies. Living as 'entrepreneurial selves' at the intersection of neoliberalism and psychology, subjects are required to continually rework themselves to become masters of self-invention and innovation (Teo, 2018). Contemporary psychological problems may indeed result from the demands of an increasingly psychologized neoliberal society, perversely through its allures of happiness and well-being (Adams et al., 2019; Ahmed, 2010; De Vos, 2008; Greco & Stenner, 2013; Schrecker & Bamba, 2015) and concealing structural violence (Farmer, 2004; Hodgetts & Stolte, 2017). Within such societies, mainstream psychology has been understood by critical psychologists as legitimizing neoliberal policy through its insistence on psychologization (e.g., Arfken, 2018; De Vos, 2008).

The increasingly pervasive neuropsychological paradigm adds to this trend of discounting social context and responsabilizing the individual, but also complicates it (e.g., De Vos, 2016; Rose & Abi-Rached, 2014). First, the personal mind is frequently reduced to the brain and its neurological workings or components, potentially impoverishing the perceived agency of the subject (e.g., popular sentiments such as "I feel depressed, so there must be something wrong going on in my brain"). Secondly, the contemporary academic and popular emphasis on the brain enables additional ways of social control, as subjects are made responsible for caring for their brains, keeping it adaptive and productive

(De Vos, 2016). Subjects thereby find themselves as agents in relationships with their own brains, which sometimes are portrayed to have agentic qualities superseding the mind (Broer & Pickersgill, 2015). Hence, not only psychologization, but also neurologization can be co-opted as an ideological tool or apparatus of the neoliberal state (see De Vos, 2008, 2016; Madsen & Brinkman, 2011; Marvakis, 2019; Moncrieff, 2008).

Public health and neoliberalism in Norway

Contradictory impulses within Norwegian society make this country an interesting case for examining a specific configuration of neoliberalism and how the state approaches public mental health. The shaping of the post-WW2 welfare state included a considerable emphasis on public health work (Schjøtz, 2003). Nevertheless, approaches to mental health were of a largely curative nature, rather than addressing the prevention of mental health problems, or the root causes of mental suffering (Ramsdal, 2013). Although mental health was repeatedly prioritized in governmental planning, advocacy groups pointed out that public sector funding for mental health grew less than for somatic health (The Norwegian Council for Mental Health, 2004), and in any case continued to be channeled largely towards treatment rather than contextual or structural change.

Since the 1980s, Norway's extensive system of public services has been increasingly influenced by neoliberal policies (Carlquist et al., 2007). Many sectors of Norwegian society were subject to market reforms. Health and care services were scrutinized for cost-effectiveness and increasingly governed by principles of New Public Management. It hence makes sense to describe Norway as currently signifying a *neoliberal welfare state*, in that such a term illustrates the state's fundamentally ambidextrous quality (Bourdieu, 2000), with the capacity to move resources and manpower between its paternalistic, coercive, disciplinary, and punitive "right hand" and its assistive, caring, and protective "left hand" (Bourdieu, 2014, p. 368; see also Wacquant, 2012). According to Nafstad et al. (2007), such policies have contributed to a shift in values among the population, from the collective to the individual. For instance, while the importance of social inequalities for mental health is acknowledged by health authorities, not only have inequalities been rising (Arntzen et al., 2019), but there also has been, as Madsen (2020) notes, an intensification of individualization in governmental white papers on public health.

From the 2000s, public mental health literature has increasingly emphasized preventive work and the promotion of well-being, reflecting an understanding that costs for providing treatment could rise endlessly, given the considerable and maybe even rising prevalence of mental health problems (Newton, 2013). Although psychotherapeutic specialist treatment is still a dominant approach in the Norwegian mental health field, emphasis has gradually shifted towards principles of early intervention and prevention, especially in local municipal community contexts (Ose et al., 2018). During the 2010s, low-threshold

municipal psychological services were established nationwide (Elstad & Eide, 2017). It is acknowledged in governmental white papers that challenging life contexts are crucial determinants of mental health problems, and effective preventive work therefore necessitates addressing and changing these contexts (Meld. St. 2018-2019). Nevertheless, the recently developed municipal services still tend to target individual rather than community needs, such as by offering psychoeducational or coping courses or even therapy sessions to service users (see e.g., Helland et al., 2021). In sum, despite governmental recognition of contextual determinants of public mental health, the individual mind remains as the key site for intervention.

Following Parker's (1999) statement that “ideology works not because it simply offers an account that can be willingly adopted or easily refused, but precisely because it saturates commonsense” (p. 14), our analysis highlights ways in which mainstream psychological science penetrates common sense and thus takes on ideological functions. By critically examining elements of the “Only You” governmental health campaign – a result of collaboration of social actors such as civil servants, scientific reference groups of academics and practitioners, (hired) consultants, a psychological interest organization and advertising agencies – we demonstrate how psychological knowledge might function as social control of individuals, who are ideologically shaped to become self-regulating responsibilized agents, i.e., neoliberal subjects.

The «Only You» campaign



Figure 1. The campaign logo: “Only You ...can say yes to changes”

The Norwegian Directorate of Health launched the “Only You” public health campaign in 2019. It involved multiple communication strategies for motivating Norwegian citizens to make small adjustments to their everyday habits by engaging in healthier life choices, specifically related to alcohol and tobacco consumption, nutrition, mental health, and physical activity (Helse Norge, 2023a). The campaign existed across multiple platforms and included promotional “Only You” videos, multiple resources interlinked directly on the Health Directorate’s website and the “Go me” (“Heia meg”) digital app, consisting of digital exercises and advice. Our analysis focuses predominantly

upon elements drawn from the mental health theme of the campaign. We first describe and briefly analyze the “Only You” mental health video¹ and the campaign’s mental health launch page entitled “Five recommendations for increased quality of life and stronger mental health” (Helse Norge, 2023b). Thereafter, we investigate the subsequent “Everyday Happiness” (“Hverdagsglede”) informational videos, which constitutes the main part of our analysis.

“Only You” campaign video and launch pages

The “Only You” campaign videos were televised as infomercials on nationwide TV channels, promoted on social media platforms and posted on the Health Directorate’s YouTube channel. The videos consist of either a 50- or 30-second clip and follow a near-identical structure and format. A recognizable Norwegian actor plays a character who is overtly engaged in a particular health problem, including inactivity, eating junk food, smoking, drinking and social withdrawal. In each video, significant others soon appear, attempting to help the person change their unhealthy behavior, but with no success. Following this failure, a doppelgänger of the person appears, played by the same actor, and manages to successfully convince the person to make the necessary lifestyle change. The video ends with the song “Only You” by The Platters.

In the mental health video, we see a young woman alone in her apartment, displaying nonverbal signs of sadness, appearing disheveled and, by implication, depressed. Her doorbell rings and three concerned friends stop by to cheer her up. They unsuccessfully attempt to convince her to join them for a yoga session in the park, but the young woman persuades them to leave. Next, another friend comes by with two tickets for a show, again to no avail. Finally, a new person rings the doorbell. As the woman opens the door, to her surprise, her doppelgänger appears with two cups of coffee (see Figure 2). The protagonist and her double both smile and then leave the apartment together as the “Only You” song ends the video, with the added textual message “Only you can say yes to changes. Learn to strengthen your mental health at helsenorge.no².”

¹ <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ahToRAXGTjo>

² Information and self-service website for all the public health services

Figure 2

The “Only You” videos provide examples of restrictive agency (Holzkamp, 1991) and how healthism (Crawford, 1980) and neoliberalism (e.g., Teo, 2018) have permeated a Norwegian public health campaign. They illustrate how agency may be restricted in the Norwegian welfare state, because of how they frame choices for improving one’s health. They all suggest that there is no possibility of help beyond one’s own actions. Significant others who clearly care and attempt to help are framed as utter failures. Moreover, the videos offer no possibilities of systemic solutions to each individual’s problems. In the mental health video, for example, the depressed woman is confined to a highly restrictive form of agency because seemingly her only choice for resolving her mental health problems is to change herself via her *doppelgänger*. The protagonist’s actual and caring social network has no effect and is rejected, even though her friends are clearly aware of the fact that she is struggling and are willing to help. What is perhaps surprising from a critical psychological point of view is that the videos are neither subtle nor careful in their state-sponsored, healthist attempts to responsabilize subjects for their own health problems and choices. In our view, the portrayal of significant others as irrelevant further serves an ideological function in which a “social form of life” is colonized or suppressed by neoliberal subjectivity (Teo, 2018, p. 583). By promoting a self-reliant, autonomous subject who can resolve mental health issues entirely alone, the video also stands in contradiction not only to established psychological and sociological research (e.g., Cacioppo et al., 2014; Umberson & Karas Montez, 2010), but even to central ideas of the “five ways of well-being” which the Directorate promoted, and to which we now turn.

The launch webpage for the wider “Only You” campaign was modified in 2022 to a new campaign, which at the time of writing was called “Live” (“Lev”). However, the content of the webpage remained largely the same. The campaign aims are immediately presented, as providing “free and knowledge-based tools and advice if you want to change a habit, or just need information about small steps you may take to improve your health.” When it comes to mental health,

users are told that there are “Five recommendations to strengthen your mental health” using the key phrases “Be mindful” (“Vær oppmerksom”), “Keep learning” (“Forsett å lære”), “Be active” (“Vær aktiv”), “Make connections” (“Knytt bånd”) and “Give” (“Gi til andre”). The user is then directed to a new webpage where the Directorate introduces its evidence base for the mental health part of the campaign by referencing the “Five Ways to Wellbeing” report contractually produced for the UK government by the British think tank New Economics Foundation (Aked et al., 2008). The online resources provide definitions of key concepts and additional advice on the five recommendations, including both text and short digital videos belonging to a wider mental health and well-being program entitled “Everyday Happiness.” “Everyday Happiness,” a registered trademark, refers to a package of public health measures developed by The Norwegian Council for Mental Health (NCMH) in cooperation with the Norwegian Directorate of Health, the Norwegian Institute of Public Health, municipal Healthy Life Centres and the psychology research group Promenta at the University of Oslo (Prydz et al., 2022). The NCMH is an umbrella organization encompassing major interest and user organizations, labor unions, ideal/humanitarian organizations and educational institutions in the field of mental health. The broader “Everyday Happiness” program has become widespread in Norway, used by municipality psychologists in treatment, offered as part of psychological services to university students, and introduced to marginalized groups such as refugees (Prydz et al., 2022).

“Everyday Happiness” videos

The Directorate has promoted six videos produced by the “Everyday Happiness” program, one general and five specifically related to each pathway to well-being. The “Everyday Happiness” videos contain more complexity than the “Only You” video. The activity involved in realizing these pathways is referred to as a ‘grep’, a Norwegian term connoting embodied action and etymologically similar to the English ‘grip.’ A voiceover narrator identically introduces each video with a message that there are five ways to increased well-being, supported by research. Thereafter, the narrator provides more specific information about each of these pathways and practical instructions for how the user may ‘get a grip’ in order to achieve well-being. The central character in all videos is a cartoon figure of a hand, which takes on an anthropomorphic form, walking around on its legs and displaying various facial expressions. The hand is seen engaged in multiple activities and states such as suffering problems, being lazy, feeling lonely, or meeting other hands. At key points in each video, it achieves happiness.

We will now describe and analyze selected narrator utterances and images from each of the five videos. Specifically, we show how the videos construct neoliberal subjectivities through different routes, some of which are subtle and others more explicit.

Be mindful

The general message of this video is that subjects can attain everyday happiness by exercising control of where they direct their attention. We are first introduced to the upset hand which has cut itself while slicing a cucumber because it is unfocused and inattentive in the actual moment (Figure 3). The narrator informs us that:

When we are unaware of where our attention is directed, we might easily go through life on autopilot. Rushing around in our own little bubble, where we risk missing out on what is happening to us right here and now. We are often more present in ruminating over what has happened, or worrying about the future... in fact, not much is required for you to notice the effect of becoming more mindful. Simply becoming aware of where you direct your attention, will make a great difference... It requires a bit of exercise. The more you work on it, the stronger you get.

Figure 3



Here, the inattentive subject is depicted as distracted by ponderings about the past or concerns for the future, which makes them miss out on what is happening to them in the present. Suggestions for what the viewers should do to become more attentive are trivial. For example, we are told to “become aware of “sounds, smells”, or “the color of your local shop attendant’s hair.” Ultimately the aim, according to the narrator, is to “become aware of what you think and feel.” From a critical perspective, urging subjects to solely focus on superficial features of their environments and the here-and-now of their sensations arguably contributes to ideologically concealing contradictions and injustices of everyday life. Attention is deflected away from, for instance, job insecurities, homeless people on the streets, or worrying about the climate crisis. Paradoxically, then, we might become *less* aware of “what is happening to us” in our lived lives.

The call for working on mindfulness, and a consequent promise of happiness and strength, is backed by referring to research:

Research shows that mindfulness training improves our immune systems, increases feelings of joy, and can prevent stress and depression. We get better at focusing, which again can improve our memory.

While mainstream research might support such conclusions, the video ignores scholarly controversies and research pointing towards potential harmful effects of mindfulness practices (Ng, 2016; Van Dam et al., 2018). Hence, the campaign does not simply provide research-based objective knowledge to its audience, but rather molds individuals into certain types of subjects. Individuals are encouraged to concentrate on themselves in the here-and-now. Although presented as a technique, this message here occupies a key role in public health communication of how to attain well-being, and even what constitutes well-being. Towards the end of the video, the narrator recommends the following:

Let yourself be absorbed by an activity so that you forget both time and place. ... It doesn't have to be complicated. Do what works for you.

The video's call for self-centered mindfulness limits critical attention, most definitely of collective awareness toward structural inequalities, systemic conditions or imagined futures, hence reducing possibilities of generalized action potency. Furthermore, it may result in victim-blaming in the sense that potentially highly legitimate concerns in subjects' lives become individualized (Smail, 2005): Stress resides inside the subject and it is the subject's own fault that they are stressed out. This attributional logic is a key feature of neoliberal subjectivity (Teo, 2018; see also Prilleltensky, 1999). It responsabilizes the subject for attending primarily to superficial aspects of the present and ignoring, among other things, contextual conditions that produce the subject's worries in the first place. This attention-diverting process, in our interpretation, results in restrictive agency for the subject (e.g., Holzkamp, 1991).

Keep learning

In this video we are introduced to the hand lazily watching TV on its sofa (Figure 4). The narrator expresses:

It is an easy thing to meander around familiar paths. When did you last push the limits of your comfort zone? It is actually only at the limits of this zone, or in fact a bit outside, that we can develop. When we learn something new, we have to go beyond what we are used to, and push ourselves outside what feels one hundred percent safe.

Figure 4

Together, the first images and the narrative construct an irresponsible subject in need of improvement. The notion of having to *push* oneself reflects a neoliberal subjectivity in which an ever-changing self takes risks to acquire new skills, in order to increase its marketable value (Adams et al., 2019). From here, the narrator suggests that one reason to keep learning is that it,

...enables the brain to keep active and quick. The human brain is built for learning. Therefore, it needs to be challenged. Everything you do and learn, changes the brain. That is because new connections are created every time you learn something new. New knowledge offers new possibilities. And when we make new connections, new traces are made in the brain, allowing you to break old habits.

Figure 5

This segment presumes a duality between the brain and the subject (see also Figure 5). Subjects are compelled not only to manage and change themselves, but

also their brains. The excerpt provides a striking example of “governing through the brain,” as it responsabilizes subjects to care for their neural connections (Rose & Abi-Rached, 2014, p. 16). This neurological turn reflects post-Fordist production and modes of consumption within neoliberal capitalism (e.g., Boltanski & Chiapello, 2005), as the educated brain is construed as providing surplus value (“new possibilities”) ready to be extracted by the market (De Vos, 2016). To challenge the brain in this way, the subject is then explicitly instructed to create value by challenging itself:

Become aware. Do something you have not done before, big or small. Everything has value. In fact it makes no big difference what you learn, as long as you learn something. Today, it may be enough to have seen this film. And tomorrow, go out and explore something else.

This excerpt demonstrates a strong imperative to be innovative and on the move, which are prerequisites of neoliberal entrepreneurial subjectivity (Adams et al., 2019; Teo, 2018). This obligation is temporarily softened as the narrator states that it makes no difference what one learns, but the imperative rapidly returns, “Tomorrow, go out and explore something else.” Although this imperative seemingly opens up endless (action) possibilities, learning is always an activity of contradiction, containing not only opportunities to develop, possibly leading to increased self-determination, but also coercions to acquire existing knowledge resulting in the subject reproducing the social order (Marvakis, 2014). Whether learning leads to restrictive or generalized action potency depends on the organization of society (Holzkamp, 1991). The insistence on continuous learning in the video resonates with a lifelong learning paradigm, which, according to Olssen (2006), constitutes a form of neoliberal control, operating through market discourse and the entrepreneurial subject (see also Vassallo, 2015). Rapidly increasing societal heterogeneity and complexity entails new complex problems to be solved through new technologies, new forms of work and modes of production. The individual subject’s readiness for change therefore becomes imperative for neoliberalism. If individuals accept this subjectivity as implored in the video, pursuing constant learning in search of better well-being and full realization of their potentials may become a form of voluntary self-exploitation (Lee, 2022). Ironically, individuals can then construe the demand for lifelong learning as an “opportunity,” as they voluntarily and willingly pursue self-betterment within the logic of neoliberalism (Lee, 2022). In this way, neoliberalism transforms social and political problems into learning problems that need to be tackled by individuals and their brain-governing efforts, rather than solved through collective efforts and structural approaches (Biesta, 2016; Rose & Abi-Rached, 2014).

Be active

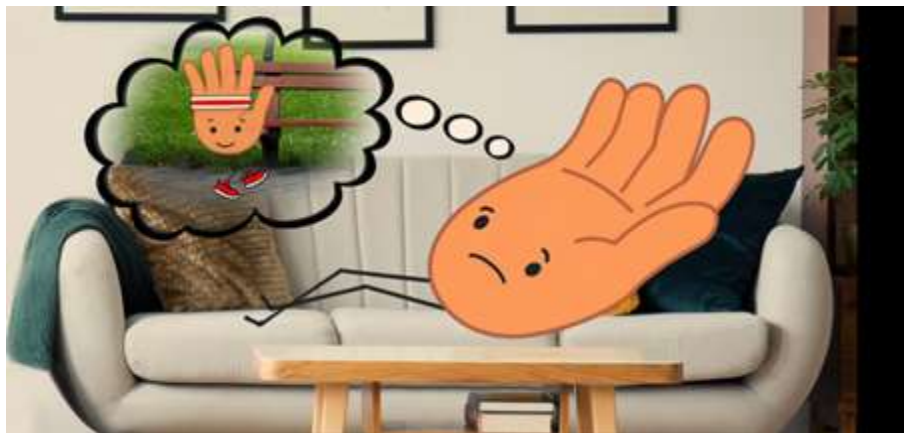
This video starts out more positively than the previous two. We initially find the hand rather happily standing in its living room and then subsequently engaged in

physical activity as the narrator provides the viewer with a broad, optimistic promise of well-being:

Imagine if there existed a cure that could prevent most lifestyle illnesses, provide lots of energy, and reduce stress, anxiety and depressions. Please welcome... physical activity. Being physically active simply does wonders for body and soul.

This one-size-fits all narrative about how the relationship between physical activity and mental health may act as a "cure" to multiple potential health problems is soon used to justify healthist ideas (Crawford, 1980). We see the hand actively running through the park, wearing a headband. However, there is a twist to this video: We find out that the hand has actually been daydreaming. We are returned to the reality of its living room, as we see that the hand has been lazily and sadly imagining the physical activity (see Figure 6). Thus, the hand is subtly responsabilized for a lack of physical activity as the narrator asks, "But why is it so difficult to be active when we know it is good for us?"

Figure 6



Posing this question implicitly reveals a contradictory feature of the campaign. Public psychoeducation, here conveying to the public what they already know is good for them and implicitly responsabilizing them, does not necessarily lead to the expected outcome. However, the video attempts to address this problem through a neurological turn:

The reality is that the brain prefers to be lazy. It is indeed programmed to save energy and will therefore instinctively choose to be in the state it already is, because new challenges require a lot of energy. That means that you have to take action and override the brain's impulses. Get yourself up off the sofa and begin! Make up your mind!

Here, by referring to qualities of the brain (cf. Rose & Abi-Rached, 2014), the campaign justifies several imperatives: Take action, get up from the sofa, fight

your lazy brain. The neuroeducational approach taken here demonstrates once again how subjects should discipline their brains to provide surplus value (De Vos, 2016). The narrative continues:

Our body is made for movement and it will reward you each and every time. When you exercise, endorphins are induced, which increases well-being and reduces stress. Exercise can also result in better memory, learning, sleep and less psychological suffering. Make up your mind! Experience the good feeling of having defeated the doorstep.

As this quotation illustrates, working on oneself as a tool for achieving happiness involves and rewards both the mind and the body (Teo, 2018). By conquering the brain, the mind-body subject is constructed as defeating barriers. The implicitly conveyed idea of becoming a resilient subject through choosing to be active aligns with the individual responsibility lying with the neoliberal subject (Joseph, 2013). Immediately following the above excerpt, the video then ends:

Do it for the most important person in your life – yourself! Go you, and good luck.

Here, in prioritizing the self, this video unabashedly promotes a fully neoliberal subjectivity (Teo, 2018). In seeming contrast, the final two videos, to which we now turn, appear to emphasize more relational and collective aspects of well-being. However, as we shall illustrate, they continue to construct neoliberal subjectivity through individual responsabilization and neurogovernance.

Connect

After the standard introduction, we find the hand standing at the entrance of a cave as an outsider, observing a primitive tribe of ‘cave hands’ in harmony inside the cave. The protagonist hand is framed as lonely. It does not join the other hands and is not invited into the cave. Instead, the hand quickly returns from this scenario to its own everyday reality, sitting alone on a park bench, sad and imagining the tribe (Figure 7). The narrator informs the viewers:

Humans are herd animals. Having good relationships with other people is high on the list of our basic needs. And even though our needs to be social differ, it is important for all people to feel belongingness and to be part of something.

While it is uncontroversial that relationality and belonging are important for people’s well-being, it is of note how the opening statement and subsequent imagery draw on evolutionary psychology. The reference to primitive times and a tribal metaphor for belonging are clearly intended to illustrate a ‘fundamental human needs’ argument.

Figure 7

Then the narrator makes it clear that benefits of social connections for the subject are confirmed by science:

Research shows that belonging and togetherness yields more happiness in everyday life. Good relationships can make you more prepared to cope with the more difficult periods of life and can improve your health. That means that you will probably live longer. Also, it is through interacting with others you can get to know yourself better, and experience happiness and togetherness. Make connections to others ... Coziness and closeness induce chemicals in the brain, and the joy emerges regardless of whether the closeness is provided by a friend with or without fur.

There is indeed ample evidence linking poor mental health with loneliness (e.g., Cacioppo et al., 2014), lack of strong ties to community and lack of friends (e.g., Haslam et al., 2018; Hayes et al., 2022). Nevertheless, we critically question the function of reminding individuals who might suffer from lacking social connections that it would be good for them to have some. The narrator underlines that for the individual who follows the imperative to make connections to others and invests time in them, there is longevity and joy to be obtained. Such forms of self-management are hence motivated by the promise of health and long life (Crawford, 1980) as well as happiness (Ahmed, 2010; Cabanaz & Illuz, 2019). Yet, without taking into consideration the social location of the individual, who might be psychologically suffering exactly because of being othered and excluded, e.g., due to sexual orientation, social or economic status, religion or culture, the subject of this message is given undue responsibility for connecting; precisely as expected of a neoliberal subject (Teo, 2018). Such responsabilization effectively diverts viewer's attention from a complex modern world full of inequalities and exclusions. The modern state and the dominant neoliberal capitalist system, which to a large degree regulates the type of connections possible to individuals, are nowhere to be found at this point.

Two further and interrelated points are relevant here: First, human relations are depicted as substitutable, even by non-humans ("with fur"), in contrast to the initial emphasis on connecting to other *people*. Second, even though the image of

the brain does not appear in this video, relations are explained and justified in passing by brain activity and chemistry. The neurological argument further obscures the economic and social embeddedness of the individuals and thus may serve to further the neoliberal project (Moncrieff, 2008).

Critically, throughout, the video depicts an individualistic or self-centered subject, who is predominantly concerned with how they benefit from the connections. Others are constructed as important only insofar as they serve one's own interests in achieving joy and happiness.

Give

This video emphasizes how giving causes positivity and can benefit both the giver and the recipient. It underlines that giving does not necessarily entail gifts or material things:

When you hear the word "giving", you might think of gifts and other material things, but that need not be the case. There is so much you can give away, which is both simple and free. Such as smiling at someone you walk past, or giving a compliment, a favour or an encouragement.

Further on, subjects are described as “a resource in others’ lives” with the possibility “to make both them and oneself happy...by doing something nice for others.” Despite this emphasis on mutuality, the video demonstrates clear tendencies of individualizing and neurologizing:

Many people say they feel stronger and more energetic when they have helped somebody. Others say they become calmer and get an increased feeling of self-worth. Now that is fantastic, but how come? To give activates areas in the brain that are responsible for happiness, rewards and well-being. Research indicates that when we move attention away from ourselves, negative thoughts and stress can be lessened.

These statements emphasize the psychological benefits of giving for the giver, rather than for the recipient. While it can be argued that this focus follows logically from the self-help aim of the overall campaign, we nevertheless note that the benefits of giving are located not only in the mind, but also the brain, again backed by research. Caring for others is a means of caring for one's own brain (cf. Rose & Abi-Rached, 2014). The goal of caring for others becomes an egocentric motivation for individual well-being and happiness. This interpretation is further strengthened by the following excerpt.

Of course, one can also imagine that this creates positive chain reactions. Imagine that the smile you give away one day goes from person to person, in the shape of good deeds and words, and in the end reaches yourself on a day you really need some encouragement.

Here, positive chains of caring for others end up, once again, ultimately to benefit the giver. From this perspective, human relationships and connections are understood in terms of instrumentality, transforming others into tools for one's own well-being. So, even at points where the campaign explicitly highlights connections and caring for others, the implied individualistic subject is isolated and responsabilized. The resulting neoliberal subject is first and foremost concerned with itself (e.g., Teo, 2018), as exemplified by the ending:

Tomorrow, when you wake up, you can for instance choose to smile at the first person you see. Perhaps to yourself in the mirror.

Figure 8



Here, the potential other has vanished and been replaced by the self ("you"), more precisely: a mirror image of the self (Figure 8), akin to the *doppelgänger* of the "Only You" videos presented above. While the principle of welfare states originally promoted a subjectivity, whereby solidarity and love meant giving priority to the Other (Goodman, 2012), this video perhaps illustrates how far neoliberalism has come in weakening collective bonds (e.g., Bourdieu, 2000). The call for other-directedness and the potential for compassion is turned back onto an imaginary self, thus further isolating the subject from the world of other people: There is only you.

Discussion

Our analysis of the "Only You" public health videos has attempted to illustrate how *psychology functions as politics by other means* in the Norwegian welfare state. The campaign constructs neoliberal subjectivities through both explicit and subtle routes. Self-centered subjects are promoted as agents, but their agency becomes restricted. A key aspect of our analysis is how the campaign explicitly makes use of psychological knowledge, encompassing everyday common sense and references to mainstream science, including well-being research and

neuropsychology, to responsabilize individual subjects for their own mental health. Simultaneously, the campaign conceals societal context in more or less subtle ways. These processes of shifting responsibility away from the collective and instead onto the subject illustrates the continued relevance of Fromm's critique: Public mental health problems are attributed to individual shortcomings.

Throughout the "Only You" and "Everyday Happiness" videos, people are portrayed as able to change. They are endowed with a degree of agency and autonomy (e.g., to get out of their apartments, learn something new, be active). Hence by being encouraged to make certain changes in their everyday lives, people are supposedly enabled to improve their well-being and better realize their potentials. However, the prescribed change is the responsibility of the individual and must take place within individual minds and through self-oriented activities. Using Holzkamp's (1991) terminology, we suggest that the campaign promotes a restrictive action potency. Yet, developing a neoliberal subjectivity is not simply a one-directional process of subordination (Teo, 2018). Subjects who mold themselves and accomplish becoming a part of the neoliberal system (insofar as the system allows) according to prevailing expectations will experience a kind of agency and have access to the fruits of neoliberalism. However, seeking "continuous self-optimization through psychological means" is a form of subjectivity-in-the-making which can never be completed (Cabanaz & Illouz, 2019, p. 177). Such expectations illustrate the heavy burden placed on the shoulders of the self-actualizing, self-monitoring entrepreneurial subject of neoliberalism (Parker, 1999; Rose, 1999; Teo, 2018). Although the campaign frames such responsabilizing in a positive context, with the apparent goal of autonomous individuals who exert agency, it can more critically be seen as forcing forms of autonomy upon individuals, which instead limit and even counteract wider forms of agency (Davies & Elwyn, 2008; see also Marvakis, 2019).

We propose that the underlying expectations of particular forms of participating in life (being active, being mindful, etc.) function throughout the campaign as neoliberal governing techniques. They mold responsible citizens who internalize certain duties or tacit rules and govern themselves accordingly by working on themselves to achieve better mental health (Rose, 1999). As a consequence, possibilities for individuals to imagine changing societal or even local contexts to improve their life conditions are suppressed. Ultimately, change becomes a course of action conducted only by the self, and directed only at the self, while collective action possibilities remain unactualized (Cabanaz & Illouz, 2019; Teo, 2018).

Overall, the campaign appears to be based on a strategy of psychoeducation, also including neuroeducation. Its assumption is that once individuals know how the psyche or the brain works, they will be able to manipulate and profit from it (De Vos, 2016). This premise aligns with neoliberal recipes for how to achieve success for (self-)disciplined and (self-)controlled individuals, who can then be held accountable for success or lack thereof (Teo, 2018, p. 13). Accordingly, in order to mobilize the public to undertake and perform self-governing tasks, the state apparatus needs first and foremost to

educate people. In the "Only You" campaign, this education places the responsibility for well-being on the target population by "promoting" sufficient psychological tools for subjects to challenge their brains in everyday life by engaging in activities that give joy, such as "going for a walk," "playing a guitar," or "doing crossword puzzles." By investing in and strengthening their own mental health, subjects are molded into educated, academically informed entrepreneurs of their selves (Teo, 2018) and their brains (De Vos, 2016; Rose & Abi-Rached, 2014).

Rose (1999, p. xviii) has argued that "[w]hen our culture provides us with life narratives couched in psychological terms, our lives really do become psychological in their design." In the "Everyday Happiness" videos, the brain is depicted as a separate subject, creating a brain-mind duality. Hence, a mereological fallacy is committed: The brain and some of its parts are ascribed psychological attributes that only make sense when ascribed to human beings (e.g., 'lazy'). Thus, the campaign contributes to 'brain-talk' as a commonsense way people make sense of themselves. Through such looping effects (Hacking, 1995), the campaign promotes neurologized subjects, who not only work on themselves, but also on their brains. Through psychological and neuropsychological lenses, the self and the brain become reservoirs of potential that need to be continuously realized (De Vos, 2016). The campaign appears to reflect a belief that "by acting on our brains, we can improve our mental life and enhance our everyday capacities to meet the ceaseless demands for self-development and self-management that characterize our contemporary form of life" (Rose & Abi-Rached, 2013, p. 226).

In most of the videos, as we have tried to illustrate, context is downplayed or largely absent. From our point of view, the campaign therefore functions ideologically to conceal both microsocial and macrosocial dynamics that create conditions for mental health. The microsocial includes structures and practices which may be present in relationships, schools, places of employment and other everyday settings, while the macrosocial includes factors such as social inequalities, inclusion and marginalization. For instance, we have no idea why the woman in the "Only You" mental health video is upset and isolates herself, or why her friends apparently cannot help her. As a result, the decontextualizing catch-all approach of the campaign fails at capturing (or successfully conceals the relevance of) the social location of the individual, ignoring any social and societal mechanisms that structure life in particular ways, and potentially sustain exclusionary and discriminatory practices. Similarly, Moncrieff (2022) has argued that by obscuring the political nature of wellbeing and mental health, individual health-promoting activities are encouraged, while attention is diverted from the failings of the underlying neoliberal capitalist economic system. Contextual concealment is further accomplished by the selective knowledge claims and evidence base in the "Everyday Happiness" videos. The campaign appears to take for granted that happiness is a subjective, psychological issue independent from other social and economic circumstances (Cabanaz & Illouz, 2019).

We are aware that critical analyses of the type we offer here stand the risk of painting too unnuanced a picture of public health work in Norway. Through governmental strategy documents, Norwegian health authorities do acknowledge how societal factors such as poverty, unemployment, discrimination and debt are related to mental health, while reducing social health inequalities is an explicit political aim of the Norwegian welfare state (Meld. St. 19, 2018-2019). Yet, attempting to safeguard health and functioning of the population, the same authorities develop campaigns such as “Only You” which, when directed at the general public, advocate purely individualistic strategies for improving well-being, and conceal context. The campaign language of individual strategies for well-being derived from mainstream psychological research can therefore be understood to be compatible with neoliberalism in offering person-centered explanations as ways out of social malaise (Prilleltensky, 1999; Moncrieff, 2008).

Concluding remarks

In our interpretation, the “Only You” campaign shifts responsibility for the well-being of the population onto the shoulders of the individuals themselves, in part by simply *telling people* how to take care of their own mental health. Critical literature has long recognized the limitations and dangers of framing health problems and solutions primarily at the individual level (e.g., Crawford, 1980; Fromm, 1955). Moreover, in the contemporary neoliberal context, psychological science increasingly promotes active self-management as a key pathway to happiness, and by extension to address mental health issues (Madsen, 2015). Psychological knowledge, such as appropriated in the campaign, can therefore become a powerful ideological tool for the neoliberal state. Individuals who do not engage in constant self-surveillance and self-betterment risk becoming failed neoliberal subjects (Teo, 2018).

Neoliberalism provides a framework where the social safety net of the public welfare state may be gradually downscaled with the goal of creating responsible, healthy, productive, entrepreneurial and seemingly happy subjects for the capitalist economy (Greco & Stenner, 2013; Harvey, 2007). Our analysis of “Only you” illustrates such neoliberal developments in a Norwegian context. As discussed by Wacquant (2012), neoliberalism increasingly transforms the welfare state, originally concerned with public goods, from a protective and collectivizing role towards one that is not only individualizing, but also disciplinary. This implies that groups at the top of the class structure enjoy the freedoms offered by neoliberalism. However, those who find themselves at the bottom become responsibilized as failed subjects faced with a form of punitive paternalism – for example through public health campaigns which tell them to “get a grip” and conceal contexts that impact upon their well-being. These political and societal developments therefore could reflect an issue of structural violence in the welfare state. Marginalized groups at the bottom of the class structure can be further oppressed, as they, through behavioral nudging, become

responsibilized as morally inadequate (Cromby & Willis, 2014; Hodgetts & Stolte, 2017).

To conclude, we do not aim to challenge the rather obvious fact that, at a general level, mindful attention, learning, activity, social bonds and giving can all be beneficial for mental health. We recognize that such ways to well-being can be integrated into community work or wider structural policy reforms to improve people's lives. Our concern is rather *how* the campaign videos function, through being aimed at the general public, to construct and reproduce neoliberal subjectivities. From this perspective, the "Only You" campaign reveals a stark contradiction of neoliberal ideology. While neoliberalism seemingly promotes freedom and emancipation for individuals who are willing to do the necessary work (i.e., work on self), in practice, it arguably functions in totalizing ways, reducing the possibility of generalized action potency.

In contrast to developing psycho- and neuroeducational approaches such as those adopted by the "Only You" campaign, we suggest instead that psychologists should base their work on the idea of consciousness-raising (Martín-Baró, 1995). This implies that no intervention in an individual's life can be considered effective or successful, unless the individual is, as a result, aware of and capable of changing some of the life conditions under which they are living, preferably collectively in solidarity with others, in other words, a generalized action potency (Holzkamp, 1991). Legitimizing only individual solutions makes people less likely to advocate for social change, be it on the local or societal level. It instead bolsters psychology's reconfiguration of social problems into individual shortcomings, reinforcing the notion that there is no need to change the system when you can change the person instead (Prilleltensky, 1999; Teo, 2005), ultimately resulting in victim blaming. Hence, the more 'efficient' psychology as a productive force under neoliberalism becomes, the more it might become "an integral part of the very problems it is called on to help resolve" (Marvakis, 2019, p. 34). Akin to Fromm's critique, resistance towards the dominant requirements of the neoliberal society will only be understood as a dysfunction of the subject – not as a dysfunction of the social order (Marvakis, 2019).

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Is it just plain psychotherapy? Reflecting on the political meaning of the psychotherapist's everyday practical dilemmas

Social Cooperative Enterprise for psychological services (SCE) "*Psychi Logos EpiKinonia*"¹

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Abstract

Providing psychotherapy in the context of a Social Cooperative Enterprises (SCE) – under the *common political/ideological umbrella* of *respecting subjectivity* and conceiving requests for psychotherapy both as personal and socio-political too – we often face *practical dilemmas with political implications*. The aim of the current article is: a) to *present the inconsistencies that lie in these dilemmas*, and b) to *emphasize the political meaning they point out for us* as working subjects, as well as for the practice of psychotherapy. Reflecting critically on our first-person perspective narratives, on the basis of a “*cooperative introspection*” (Nissen, 2000), we shall address questions considering *the conditions, the premises and the consequences of*: a) the *transcendence of the individualizing and psychologizing interpretations* about the discomfort the subjects in therapy - as well as we ourselves - face, b) the *utilization of intersubjectivity in the therapeutic/counselling process*, and c) the *therapist's political "coming out", against the practice of his/her political neutrality*. Finally, through our paper we reflect upon the political implications of the different strands and interpretations of critical psychology we employ on the analysis and practice of psychotherapy, along with the discordances which these strands may include or provoke.

Keywords

co-researching, cooperative introspection, subjectivity, intersubjectivity, psychotherapy, practical dilemmas, P/politics

¹ The paper reflects the perspective of three out of six SCE's members.

Methodological references

This paper is the product of an individual and collaborative practice research with the intention to explore and understand the political implications of the practical dilemmas we face in our psychotherapy practice² as working-class members/employees³ in a Social Cooperative Enterprise (SCE)⁴ in the metropolitan centre of Greece. With the premise that the subjects whose actions we want to understand are "agents of their life in a societal context" (Schraube & Osterkamp, 2013a, p. 5) we followed the method of "co-researching" as a "cooperative introspection" (Nissen, 2000) between the co-authors (and co-workers) of this paper trying to: (a) describe in detail both the conditions of our practice and its content, and (b) reflect autonomously but also cooperatively on the everyday practical dilemmas, in order to be able to approach our initial question – as a "common problem" – on the basis of a "social self-understanding", since social knowledge always presupposes knowledge of the self and vice versa (Schraube & Osterkamp 2013; Osterkamp 2009).

During this practice research we faced theoretical and practical requirements similar to those identified by Marvakis and Triliva (2019) as determinants of the social scientists' subjectivity in the context of the psy-services' NGOization in Greece. Both the demand for high-tech knowledge and efficiency, in the absence of sufficient (material or emotional) resources and our research process as a new voluntary responsibility, were soon translated into individual and group conflicts and dilemmas similar to those we will extensively refer to later on. This condition on the one hand resulted in the reduction of our writing group and on the other hand to our constantly dealing with inconsistencies and dipoles – such as final product vs. process, or individual product vs. collaborative work – mediated by the frequent transformation of the practical conditions of our research process. As a consequence, we moved forward by taking turns in the writing of the paper and by articulating three autonomously written and cooperatively introspected critical reflections as a bastion of our "intersubjective understanding" (p. 5), that is the mutual understanding of our "subjective reasons for action" (p.48) (Schraube & Osterkamp, 2013a). After all, we feel the fruitful impact of this process in constructing a more self-and-cooperatively conscious – individual and collaborative – critical-psychological practice.

² We use the term "psychotherapeutic practice" versus "therapeutic practice" in an attempt to reclaim the term through the recognition of the multifaceted existential, social and political dimensions of mental distress, which, however, do not remain outside the boundaries of psychotherapeutic practice but enter into the everyday therapeutic praxis.

³ Our exact working conditions will be clarified later on.

⁴ Such enterprises have been operating in Greece, since the relevant legislation in 2011 (Vairami, 2015), mainly in the food industry and the food trade, as a new capitalist possibility to cope with the economic burden of traditional individual and corporate enterprises. Our SCE was founded in 2017.

Moments of contemporary capitalist restructuring in the Greek context of psychotherapeutic services

Ever since the appearance of the first psychiatric hospital in Corfu, the democratisation of psychology studies in public universities and the first licences to psychologists, the domain of psychotherapy was mainly dominated by psychiatrists in private practice, applying the dominant, Western, and medicalized psychotherapeutic approaches, utilizing the power of the expert acquired from training abroad (Avdi, 2011; Dafermos, Marvakis & Triliva, 2006). From this position, psychotherapists' subjectivity was developed on the basis of international ethical principles (Handelsman et al, 2005) by maintaining the interest in (re)producing the profession's prestige and in promoting adaptation to the specific cultural context⁵ as neutral and objective scientists, rarely disclosing personality traits and only in the context of a therapeutic "self-disclosure" (Marais & McBeath, 2021).

During the last 15 years, the onslaught of the global capitalist crises and the consequent (economic, political and social) restructuring have affected the conditions of the psychotherapeutic services' provision. More specifically, they signalled on the one hand the further shrinkage of the already reduced, degraded, underestimated and understaffed public mental health services; and on the other hand the rapid development of private psychotherapy enterprises, NGOs and a few mental health SCEs.⁶ At the same time, the rapid growth of political mobilisation during the period 2008-12 and the broadening of the social subject of the "anti-authoritarian Chóros"⁷ (Kitis, 2015) in the following years contributed significantly to strengthening the initiatives for the politicization of mental health⁸ and to developing a second wave (since the beginning of the psychiatric reform in the 1980s) of mental health workers – to which we also

⁵ As an example, we quote from the Code of Ethics for Psychologists: "In particular, a psychologist shall ensure that his or her actions, actions and general conduct do not bring his or her profession into disrepute in public opinion and, in particular, do not contradict the "public sentiment" of the place where he or she practices:

https://www.psy.gr/gfiles/3484314029.287_2019.06.19_FEK_2344_KODIKAS_DEONTOLOGIAS_PSYCHOLOGON.pdf

⁶ Indicatively: <https://psychilogos.net/>, <https://www.apo-koinou-cooperative.gr/>, <http://sintheto.kunsep.gr/>, <https://www.psychislogos.gr/>, <https://poreia-ygeias.gr/about/>

⁷ Chóros [χώρος] in Grece literally means "space". According to Christos Boukalas (2011) (as cited in Tsirtoglou, accepted)[the anti-authoritarian] "Chóros can indeed be seen as a space of flows, (inter)action, and belonging, defined and reproduced by, and containing, a multitude of individuals, organised into looser or tighter groups, formed on the basis of a combination of personal bonds, locality, and confluence of theory and/or action, that are in turn linked together selectively, in a looser or tighter fashion" (p.303). Chóros appears as a "new collective identity" in the late '70s pitted against the Right as well as the Left parties (Souzas, 2015). It's broadening during the period 2008-12 is reflected on the inclusion of left and leftist subjects in the particular mobilizations. This broadening is still maintained.

⁸ Some Athens-based projects are indicative of this politicization: the *Pan-Hellenic Coalition for Psychiatric Reform* <http://www.psypirosi.gr/>, the journal *Notebooks of Psychiatry* (quarterly publication of the scientific association of the Psychiatric Hospital of Athens), the *Hearing Voices Network* <http://www.hearingvoices.gr/>

belong – inspired by the anti-psychiatric and grassroots movements as well as by Western critical psychological theories and practices.⁹

These socio-political conditions mediated decisively the development of a rudimentary visibility of a new mental health experts' generation, subjects of the contemporary working class, who sought to challenge the dominant psychotherapeutic practice both within the workplace and in public¹⁰. The growth of this visibility as well as the rapid spread of the culture of "psychocentrism"¹¹ in everyday life (Rimke, 2011) – either through the psychologization of the economic crisis (Marvakis, 2014), or through the pathologization of "adaptation disorders" (Marvakis & Triliva, 2019), or through various psychologizing distortions of the relationship between politics and psychotherapy,¹² are factors that contributed substantially, in our opinion, to the emergence of a *differential mental health clientele* that is positioned closer (than the mainstream clientele) to the movements' politics and relevant contexts of local social participation (Dreier, 1999, p. 7) and favorably disposed towards psy-approaches critical to the dominant psychological discourse and practice. Part of this differential clientele are we ourselves and especially the younger subjects of *Chóros* who traditionally had positioned themselves against the experts and the mainstream social practices (Kitis, 2015; Souzas, 2015).

In this context, we became aware of our working with critical-psychological methodologies, in relation to what we call the *psychotherapist's political coming out*¹³ – i.e. the visibility of Politics in psychotherapy and the politics of psychotherapy (Winter, 2021) – but also of our critical reflections on the political implications of the everyday dilemmas we face and (re)produce while working, as part of the regional and international restructuring of the social conditions under which psychotherapy is provided.

A Greek SCE for the provision of psychotherapeutic services

The headquarters of our SCE (which for us is just *the office*) is a value for money apartment in a commercially developing zone of the metropolitan centre, equally shared by six partners according to each individual's needs. We are all founding members of this joint venture, working cooperatively as freelance

⁹ For a relevant presentation of the dialectical connection between *Chóros* as a social practice and the development of critical psychology in Greece see the book chapter of Youli Tsirtoglou (accepted).

¹⁰ Athens-based projects: <https://criticalpsygreece.wordpress.com/2012-omada-aytomorfosis/>, https://issuu.com/radicalma/docs/radical__1st_issue, <http://criticalpsy-net.blogspot.com/>, <https://delirium.espivblogs.net/>, Initiative for a diverse mental health movement <http://protovouliapsy.blogspot.com/>, Open social space for health <https://pikpa.squat.gr/>, Orlando LGBT+ stigma-free mental health <https://orlandolgbt.gr/>, <http://psi-action.blogspot.com/>

¹¹ In Rimke's words, the concept of "psychocentrism" refers to "the outlook that all human problems are innate pathologies of the individual mind and/or body, with the individual held responsible for health and illness, success and failure".

¹² See, for example, the anthology by the Hellenic Society for Systemic Thinking and Family Psychotherapy (2019).

¹³ See also the discussion that Youli Tsirtoglou (accepted) presents in relevance with the psychotherapist's political identity concerning "the recent development of conservative or right-leaning therapeutic practices" [critical to the dominant psychological practice] which are presented "as liberal or leftist".

partners, while most of us work in parallel¹⁴ in other mainstream psy-regimes (public education, NGOs). We think of ourselves as part of the contemporary, highly qualified cognitariat, we are inspired by (grassroots) movements (anti-psychiatry, feminist, anti-capitalist) and psy-practices in relation to such movements (e.g. self-help groups, self-consciousness groups, open dialogue, etc.), participating regularly or not in relevant socio-political actions. Gradually, through the reports of treated subjects and the increased requests from *Chóro's* subjects, we are publicly perceived at a great extent as *Chóro's psychotherapists*. This boundary *political-therapeutic identity* though – as a corporate identity – is something we have not conscientiously aimed at so far and that some of us seem more sceptical about its attribution.

Our main organised activities are: a) psychotherapeutic/ counselling sessions and b) peer-supervision. In therapeutic sessions (mainly with adults in an individual and secondarily in a family or group context) each of us has the freedom to work with a considerable degree of autonomy regarding his/her methodology, within the framework of certain, mainly implicitly formed collective guiding principles (to which we will refer later on). Other practices we have collectively decided and that we conduct are: a) finding a "therapeutic fee" (Weiner, 2019) in conjunction with the treated subjects, on the basis of the collectively agreed upon range of our fee per session as well as the financial restrictions of the treated subjects, and b) informing the treated subjects about the way we work as a team/ SCE.

The practice of peer-supervision refers to our jointly decided monthly meetings with the aim of managing: a) our working conditions (e.g. bureaucratic obligations, financial issues, working hours, space configuration) and b) the content of our work (e.g. dilemmas in the therapeutic process). The issues arise either from the current needs of our everyday practice or from our need to share methodologies and get to know each other's personal trajectories (professional, social, political, etc). The issues which each of us brings in are discussed, analysed, understood and resolved, either through sharing knowledge and responsibilities or through individual initiatives and compromises, on the basis of an *intuitive parity* – meaning the intrinsic awareness and fulfilment of everybody's needs in a fair way. In addition, however, we irregularly meet in between our sessions, in *our kitchenette*, where we often share in an offhand way everyday working or personal concerns, thus forming an atmosphere of intimacy and trust between us, which in turn creates more space for intersubjective understanding. These discussions often take place freely in the presence of the treated subjects.

At the same time, our practice is institutionally liable to a) the Code of Ethics for Psychologists and the Code of Medical Ethics and b) the SCE's legal framework. However, practically in Greece, according to our experience so far, these regulatory systems – including "ethical commitments" (Siklafidou et al., 2012) in the practice of psychiatry – constitute general and official guiding principles which are rarely subjected to scrutiny and even when they are, this is done opportunistically to serve particular interests in relation to particular

¹⁴ The reasons we resort to this choice will be presented further down.

political circumstances. This condition has provided us, also, with the possibility of operating on the borderline between the SCEs' legal framework and the legal framework of private practices/individual enterprises in shared housing. On the one hand, the cooperating members share the capital, operating costs and duties, and benefit from the favourable tax or insurance arrangements that are set for the SCEs and, on the other hand, each member is paid individually by his/her clients, having the possibility of determining individually his/her working hours and each particular therapeutic fee. The choice of this hybrid working condition (in combination with our parallel work in other working contexts) was made in order to minimize individual and group precarity, to escape the necessity (in the context of a private practice) for commercial development (through advertising, for example) and/or in order to overcome (at least partially) our dependency on the commercial exchange with clients and the negative consequences it may have on therapeutic work (e.g. keeping treated subjects in therapy due to financial interests). In addition, as Thodoris Megalooikonomou¹⁵ observes, we operate within an inherently contradictory condition, a structure within the so-called "third sector", where we must necessarily manage the provision of services through private provision in conjunction with the pursuit and search for emancipatory processes, goals and visions.

During the years of our cooperation, we try to gradually formulate concretely, in a cooperative way our internal operation regulation, concerning the conditions and the content of our work to which *we (will) choose* to be accountable. For this, we also try to develop *our guiding political/ ideological principles* on the basis of which – explicitly or implicitly – our cooperation was initiated and is developing until now. In this article we will focus on two of these guiding principles: that is a) respecting subjectivity and b) conceiving psychotherapy requests as personal *and* socio-political as well.

Respecting subjectivity

Respecting subjectivity for us¹⁶ stands as a political and ideological principle for two basic reasons. First of all, we believe that referring to the concept of subjectivity makes the connection between psychotherapy and P/politics more visible, meaning that the concept of subjectivity refers both to the concept of *work/ practice* in the context of which the subject becomes the agent for the production and control of the conditions of her life, and to *life's objective conditions* by which people are determined (Tolman, 1994; Nissen, 2002). Secondly, though, respecting subjectivity remains, for us, an implicit¹⁷ agreement at some ideological level, as an immaterial, theoretical and intellectual reality in the context of which the connection between psychotherapy - respect - subjectivity is a priori something obviously good. In other words, we seem to

¹⁵ Personal communication in the context of this article review.

¹⁶ Meaning the three co-authors of this article.

¹⁷ The practical conditions for the realization of respecting subjectivity as a principle have not yet been the subject of discussion among the whole team.

believe that this connection reflects a qualitatively and critically oriented psychotherapy since it is not part of the dominant psychotherapeutic culture in the ways it is (re)produced in various psy-discourses and practices as scientific objectivity and politically neutrality.

From our perspective, respect and subjectivity as cultural meanings, and their connection, mediate and determine the conditions and content of our work, constituting in a way some of the means of the (re)production of our work (i.e. psychotherapy). More specifically, these meanings mediate our everyday praxis, e.g. the decision making, the management of the treatment requests, the therapeutic process, the agreements of cooperation with other professionals. At the same time, we believe that by tapping into these meanings we (re)produce possibilities for "alternative/critical" (Nissen, 2009) action which for us and the treated subjects we work for/with seem to transcend the dominant objectifying – and therefore "dehumanizing" (Nissen, 2009; McWilliams, 2005) – psychotherapeutic norms.

Through our cooperative introspection for the purposes of this article, we realized that respecting subjectivity (as guiding principle) reflects our intention to relate/work inclusively, in a "decentred way" (Schraube & Osterkamp, 2013, p.333) towards the different subjective "reasons for action" (cf.p.) of the subjects with whom we (co-)work (partners, treated subjects, other professionals). In other words, respecting subjectivity reflects our subjective interest to work by acknowledging the meaning that each subject's subjective perspective may have for herself and by including equally in a collective perspective every subject's possibility to subjectively define their actions. For this, we make sure that differentiations in each subject's subjective interests (reasons, needs, values), possibilities and restrictions, concerning his/her autonomy in shaping the conditions of his/her activity/ work (e.g. in relevance with workload, need for supervision or training, need for a diagnosis or not, sessions frequency, particular everyday life advices, etc.) are being primarily understood and accepted.

From this perspective, we seem to be seeking to develop an attitude that is more concerned with what we would call the quality of the "global worker"¹⁸ (operatore globale), for whom Paolo Borghi was talking about at Trieste in relevance with the de-institutionalization, and refers to the undertaking of care, intervention and engagement including everything which may weight on the "therapeutic situation" and may constitute the conditions of the possible, the real context that is. It is about a political stance that according to Megalooikonomou (2022) involves a completely different understanding of what the therapeutic is and how it is pursued. Thus, for us respecting subjectivity as a practice is about the development of a supportive and as transparent as possible communication, understanding and action, between *not fragmented* (with all the dimensions of individuality they choose or are socially subjected to), *equal* (in terms of

¹⁸ The "global worker" (operatore globale), was a term generally discussed during Lykourgos' Karatzaferis training at the International meeting *Why change? Creativity and Innovation in mental health*, held at Trieste (22 - 27 of October 2012) and organized by the *WHO Collaborating Centre for Research and Training* for the Second module of the *Franca and Franco Basaglia International School*, in relevance with the de-institutionalization and the undertaking of care.

opportunities of participation), but also *different* (in terms of different reasons for action) subjects.

Conceiving psychotherapy requests as personal and socio-political

From our perspective, drawing on various critical psychological and critical psychiatric approaches which inspire us, the principle of conceiving psychotherapy requests as personal *and* socio-political as well reflects our interpretation of the psychological distress, which the treated subjects seek to understand, cope with or alleviate. More specifically, we support that psychological distress is not universally and deterministically determined by intrinsic and individualised, biological or psychological causes, but it is one of among the various consequences (re)produced within the socio-political organisation of societies. In addition, we believe that the way in which the socio-political organization of society (re)produces individual distress is mediated by various everyday subjective oppressions in the form of specific social/ political restrictions and possibilities for action. In other words, from our perspective psychological distress is (re)produced in the realm of the particular, everyday societal/ political conditions within which subjective reasons and possibilities for action develop.

The practical realization of this principle determines our entire practice in an unsystematic and often messy (Law, 2007) way, both in the context of the psychotherapeutic work as sessions, and in the context of our work with each other as working partners. More specifically, through our cooperative introspection we realized that the practice of this principle is about: a) ***whether we have the ability to work*** with the psychologizing/ pathologising interpretations that the treated subjects give to their distress; b) ***how we do actually work*** psychotherapeutically; by using, for example, methods of the dominant psychological/ psychiatric approaches and by focusing on the development of the subject's functioning (e.g. resilience strategies, medication)? By utilizing the expert's power, we are societally ascribed? Or, by using critical psychological/ anti-psychiatric methods, focusing – beyond adaptation and plain functionality – on an emancipatory orientation *also*, standing critical to the dominant social organization? c) ***whether we will develop other possibilities for action*** (e.g. educational, political actions) along with (or even instead of) the plainly psychotherapeutic ones, focusing on the interpretation of individual problems as socio-political problems as well. In other words, whether we will publicly (re)produce a critical-psychological/ anti-psychiatric discourse and whether our office will practically become a socio-political space and/ or place as well.

Thus, in practice, from our perspective, conceiving of psychotherapy requests as socio-political also is about restructuring the object/ content of our work within the given context of societal structures. To put it simply, it determines whether we will keep working/ surviving individually and socially as "normal" (Marvakis, 2019, p.32-33) psychotherapists "in terms of a Fordist psychology" and the means we will have to or be able to use.

Practical dilemmas and political implications

Our practice, in the way we have described it so far, constitutes a context of conditions that (re)produces a series of different individual and group practical dilemmas with clear political implications, as long as they are in relation to the *control*¹⁹ (Totton, 2000) of both ourselves' as workers and the other subjects' behaviour. Through our cooperative introspection we realized that it is of particular importance for us to illustrate these dilemmas' mental, emotional and practical structure²⁰, which is also conflictual, rambling, algorithmic and even dead-end (in an individualized way). Moreover, we wanted to inclusively illustrate their "moral" character (Teo, 2015) along with different way(s) each one of the co-authors was able to make such dilemmas "sayable" (Schraube & Osterkamp, 2013c, p. 330) as subjective reasons, possibilities or restrictions for action.

We have thus seen that our dilemmas usually involve in some way the following critical/ reflective questioning in relation to our agency:

how should I **or** how can I **or** how am I allowed to act **or**
 what is the meaning of my actions/ feelings/ experiences
 so that the consequences of my action
 to me and to the other subject(s) are right or good, with the premise that these
 consequences remain
 therapeutic or supportive,
 either in terms of functionality,
 and/ or in terms of social justice or emancipation?

We also noticed that our dilemmas – which are usually expressed during our peer-supervision or offhandedly between sessions – emerge in the following circumstances: a) when we do not know *what else we could do* in order to work therapeutically, b) when we do not know *how to apply/ follow rules or laws* concerning therapy, c) when the client's *request conflicts with our socio-political consciousness*, d) when we have *the need to understand/ get to know each other better as working social subjects*.

Finally, we came to the conclusion that the difficulties reflected in the dilemmas relate to three overarching and interrelated issues: (a) how respecting subjectivity and conceiving subjective distress will not lead us to individualistic or psychologizing acts; (b) how collaboration with other subjects (partners and/ or clients) will acquire the meaning of intersubjectivity; (c) how these two conditions will help us act more transparently as psychotherapists regarding our political position (which is quite far from neutrality).

Some indicative dilemmas that we face in relation to the above-mentioned questions and issues concerning our work are:

¹⁹ Nick Totton provides numerous examples which point out how politics and control are indissolubly connected implicitly or explicitly in various ways in relation to psychotherapy or not.

²⁰ The structure of the dilemmas' presentation below, in their written form, is deliberately chosen in order to illustrate in an emphatic way this structure as well as their moral character along with the different way(s) of their articulation.

1. *Should I or can I or is it allowed or what is the meaning of*²¹ *work/ing* with subjects whose oppression is greater than mine's, due to their subjective position (e.g. immigrants, low economic status)? Or *should I* (and *how exactly* should I) refer these clients to a professional of a corresponding subjective position, or to a therapeutic intervention specifically developed for subjects of a similar subjective position, or to a political group of solidarity towards such subjects?

2. *Should I or can I or is it allowed or what is the meaning of use/ing* concepts specifically adapted to the concepts that each treated subject uses to describe his/her personal distress? Or *can I* (and *how exactly* can I) use concepts or even political slogans which I perceive as not-psychologizing and/ or not-individualizing in relation to the distress of a collective social subject (in relevance with class, gender, race, etc.) to which both me and the particular subject (which I want to understand) belong?

3. *Should I or can I or is it allowed or what is the meaning of use/ing* the despair I experience while working psychotherapeutically with a subject experiencing despair, overwhelmed by voices (auditory hallucinations in mainstream psychiatric terminology), and *how exactly* can I use it supportively as a shared experience?

4. *Should I or can I or is it allowed or what is the meaning of talk/ing* transparently about the sexist treatment and the power differential I experience by the treated subject because of the relevant gendered social discriminations? Or *should I* (and *how exactly* should I) silence such a treatment and ask for supervision in order to deal with it individually?

5. *Should I or can I or is it allowed or what is the meaning of inform/ing* (and *how exactly* should I do this) the treated person if I am vaccinated (covid-19), respecting his/her legitimate (based on the established state of exception) right to know, violating my own political-therapeutic position towards these measures?

6. *Should I or can I or is it allowed or what is the meaning of speaking* transparently (and *how exactly*) from the position of power socially attributed to us as psychotherapists about our minority political positions and their psychotherapeutic significance, without occupying a position of alternative authority/power vis-à-vis the subject being treated?

We realized that the way we formulate our dilemmas is much more rambling than the functionalist version of a *should I do this or that* dilemma. This has to do with the fact that our practice is shaped in an often inconsistent way between dipoles such as the following: a) individual – socio-political consciousness; b) functionality – emancipation; c) obedience – resistance; d) executive action – autonomous action; e) individualization – collectivization. These dipoles reflect the socio-political contradictions that we – theoretically and practically – are trying to overcome in the context of psychotherapeutic work. On the one hand, we develop self-consciousness of our skills, possibilities for action as well as the rank (Mindell, 1995) that we or the treated subjects have, in order

²¹ These questions emerged as different ways of expressing the therapeutic dilemmas that each one of us faces and in this light, we present them here as different components of the same dilemmas.

to use them (skills, possibilities for action and rank) during the session. At the same time, within the spectrum of the dipoles, we discover *new micro-possibilities* for action, which are often included or implied in the dilemmas themselves.

Finally, we concluded that the core of our dilemmas relates to a dominant (critical) psychological – and therefore political – stake for us: *The socio-political conceptualization of the particular and situated expression of individual subjectivity, as part of a social subjectivity* (Nissen, 2002), *meaning the conceptualization of the subject and her individual action within, and mediated by, particular socio-political and cultural-historical conditions and reasons for action, along with the relevant possibilities and restrictions.*

In order to point out the meaningfulness that the above political stake has for each one of the co-authors as well as its connection with the aforementioned dipoles and our psychotherapeutic practice, we have developed three autonomous critical reflections (written by each one of us), which the reader can refer to in the appendix of this paper. In the following part though we will present the conclusions arising from our cooperative introspection over these three autonomous critical reflections.

Cooperative critical conclusions

By introspecting cooperatively over the three autonomous critical reflections, each one of us starting from a similar but also different critical-psychological and socio-political position, we discerned points of convergence and differentiation between them. All three critical reflections refer to "micropolitical tasks" (Pakman, 2004, p. 266) as new socio-political possibilities of action at various micro-levels, in the context of emancipating from the dominant psychologizing and individualizing therapeutic discourse and practice. Such micro-possibilities for action may be developed²²:

a) at the individual level and at the level of interpersonal relationship with other subjects as:

- *resistance to the covering up of dilemmas* with political implications
- the reconstruction of the therapeutic relationship so as to *involve an intersubjective condition which will include two subjects resisting a change that threatens their autonomy*²³

- *the politicization of pain in relation to the crisis of the contexts that contain the subjects in question and [the therapist's] own crisis, which s/he experiences as a professional, as a member of a cooperative in crisis, as part of the social crisis* (Karatzafis, 2023).

b) at a group level as:

²² The words in italics are extracted from the autonomous critical reflections in the appendix.

²³ Gabriel Camarrata (2022) supports that "in mainstream Psychology, [...] the concept of resilience seems to hold, in itself, all that is needed to recover from a crisis, disturbance/violence/abuse, power struggle, while resistance instead is seen as something to dismantle. This approach seems to serve the narrative of a forever resilient and adaptive human being, who at the same time is seen by governments as "so fragile" and "irresponsible" as to have to be controlled at all times for their safety and wellbeing".

- *the self-institution of practices and functionalities that will serve our needs and transcend the dilemmas*"

- *the search for alliances, "affinities" (Day, 2004).*

- *the organization of reflection groups, not of a therapeutic/ counselling objective, but with the aim of understanding subjective problems as personal and socio-political as well (...), such as the social self-understanding groups in Berlin²⁴, or the Multiloog open meetings in the Netherlands²⁵.*

c) In a broader collective political context as:

- *the (re)construction of collective emancipatory activities and processes where we develop new possibilities to overcome fears and restrictions (psychologized or material) in order to resist and collectively assert life conditions other than those which produce our distress.*

- *the prefiguration of desired worlds²⁶.*

Such micro-empowerments as movements *against the pessimism of reason, for the optimism of action²⁷* can:

- *legitimize us as emancipatory agents,*

- *help a small part of the contemporary, white proletariat to fight it out individually and socio-politically in the context of their "personal social practice" (Dreier, 2009) and in the context of the dominant capitalist dipoles,*

- *provide the place to develop forms of c/overt resistance (Schilt, 2003)²⁸.*

However, all three autonomous reflections recognise as a new political stake how we can move from this micro-level to a collective level. The first critical reflection points to the *commodification of the therapeutic services and alternativism* within neoliberal capitalism as basic constraints for the abolition of basic capitalist contradictions and suggests that *political actions are needed by psy-professionals as a collective subject of the contemporary working class*. The second critical reflection integrates *psychotherapy* [as a practice that] *"cannot substitute collective struggle; it can only contribute to it, help to empower it"* (Llorens, 2009). Additionally, the third critical reflection notes that *the anxiety of assimilation has always been there* as well as *the finite limits of action* and at the same time points out the importance of *having [these limits], to some extent, clear, as they are determined both by our relationship as partners, which is not bound to a tireless and continued political transaction, but also by the limits of the SCE itself as an institutional structure [...] of the "third sector"*.

All micro-possibilities of action within psychotherapeutic practices have limitations in their connection to a collective political level, which have to do with contemporary cultural-historical conditions. The clientelistic interests of psy-professionals in Greece, the lack of a collective labour consciousness among

²⁴ <https://www.kritische-psychologie.de/einstieg>

²⁵ <http://inca-pa.nl> & Mölders, H. (2001)

²⁶ According to Richard Day (2008, as cited in Souzas, 2015, p.18) social movements are characterised by a "prefigurative politics" where prefiguration is not just a performative process but contributes to the creation of a collective memory. It is much more a form of action that illuminates, signifies and inspires, by its very paradigm, aspects of desired worlds.

²⁷ From the titular book of Franco Basaglia (2008).

²⁸ On *I'll resist with every inch and every breath: Girls and zine making as a form of resistance*, Schilt defines c/overt resistance as the combination of overt and covert resistance (as defined by Carol Gilligan et al. 1995), highlighting their interconnectedness and the importance of both.

psy-workers, the incomplete attempts to form a labor union of psychologists/ psychotherapists (in free lance/ private practice and waged services), the decline of the social movements, as well as the lack of a culture of critical reflection on the internal processes of the social movements/ sectoral / cooperative initiatives, (re)produce the conditions in which collective demands do not thrive.

We realize, though, that even the political possibilities for action at the micro-level are not easily developed as a consequence of the continuous restructuring of everyday life due to the successive capitalist crises, the psychologization of these crises, the establishment of the "therapeutic ethos"²⁹, but also due to the lack of a more coherent and practical understanding of psychology as politics by other means. We recognize that such micro-level possibilities for action are carried out as necessary "pseudo-emancipations" (Ratner, 2013, p.15) within the context of a reformist critique³⁰ and demonstrate our inability to develop our critical praxis beyond the session as a possibility for political intervention³¹. To move beyond the practice of pseudo-emancipation as well as beyond the "session culture" (Dreier, 2008), it is necessary to develop a deep understanding of the world, self, roles and possibilities, which Freire called "conscientization" (Freire, 1970), as well as the development of a broad concept of human subjectivity and agency, where self-awareness and knowledge of social reality "are two sides of the same cognitive process" (Holzkamp, 1973, as cited in Osterkamp, 2009).

From this perspective, we conclude that what we call the therapist's *political coming out*, the way we envision it, cannot be limited to a technocratic disclosure of our political identity as therapists - as it has become recently the case in the USA³² (Drexler, 2023) - but needs to be developed through collective political actions as a socio-political consciousness raising, and from our intersubjective position/ perspective as both psy-workers and (potential) users of psy-services as well.

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²⁹ According to Silva (2011): "Despite its resonance, however, the therapeutic ethos is ultimately a risky and temporary solution to the problems that are structurally embedded in their coming of age journeys. In teaching young people that they alone can manage their emotions and heal their wounded psyches, the therapeutic ethos dovetails with neoliberal ideology in such a way as to make powerless working-class young adults feel responsible for their own happiness".

³⁰ According to Carl Ratner (2013): "Reformist critique [...] works within existing macro cultural factors to introduce small, marginal improvements in them".

³¹ Ole Dreier analyses in his book *Psychotherapy in Everyday Life* (2008), the necessity to move from the view that the subject's change takes place in sessions, towards a comprehensive view of the subject's personal social practice in many contexts.

³² For a relevant discussion in relation to the Greek context of psychotherapy and social movements see also Tsirtoglou (accepted).

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Appendix

Autonomous critical reflections

A.

What I personally find meaningful is to critically reflect over the aforementioned stake, in the context of contemporary capitalist contradictions, from a working-class perspective and in relevance with the interests of the contemporary, gendered and racialised working class.

I think, then, that psychotherapy as a dominant psychological professional activity has been developed serving the interests – in money, power and recognition (Teo, 2009) – of mainstream bourgeois psychology as a distinct positivist-scientific discipline, within the broader social division of labour. In other words, psychotherapy's development as a professional practice has been mediated by a worldless conceptualization of individual subjectivity (Schraube & Osterkamp, 2013a, p. 4), focusing on restoring the functionality of a fragmented – by psychology itself into discrete, neutral and objectively measurable functions – soul/ agency, conceptualized also as an internal consciousness (Teo, 2009).

When, therefore, the socio-political conceptualization of individual subjectivity is posed as the political stake of a psychotherapeutic activity, what is also at stake is the *value* of such a conceptualization for the *purpose* of the activity, which is the therapy of individual consciousness as a "plainly internal mental activity" (Kakarinos, 2012) and the particular subjective interests that this activity serves. In this regard, the question which arises is: can such a socio-political perspective be/ become therapeutic as well, for me as a worker and freelance entrepreneur in the context of an SCE, and for the various subjects of the contemporary working class who request treatment from me, and if so, what socio-political interests will this serve, in the specific cultural-historical context of the commodified psychotherapeutic services' provision?

In order to understand the political implications even of this alternative, critical-psychological conceptualization of the object of my work, as white, working class woman, in a way that transcends the "basic contradiction of bourgeois societies between capital and labour", I need to understand these implications practically in the context of the "secondary contradictions that determine it", such as "the international conjuncture", "the effects of the economic cycle", "the contradictions within the state apparatus" and "the contradictions within the ruling classes" (Milios, 2016). However, the social division of labour, as I have embedded it through my studies in psychology and by working as a psychologist, almost *forbids* my confident "voicing" (Schraube & Osterkamp, 2013c, p.331) here about these matters.

What I can, though, "make sayable" (Schraube & Osterkamp, 2013c, p. 330) is that for the last ten years, in my psychotherapeutic work I have been related to the contemporary high tech cognitive proletarians, co-participants of mine in the radicalized social practice of Chóros and potential comrades (Tsirtoglou, accepted), who are currently trying to deal with various kinds of dominant anxieties and symptoms related to the understanding and the development of their individual/ social subjectivity not so much (any more) by participating in collective political actions but more by seeking individualized therapeutic interventions. In this context, the *psychotherapeutic value* that the socio-political conceptualization of individual subjectivity produces today is more easily assimilated by the dominant psychotherapeutic practice and by the capitalist context of welfare services' commodification and alternativism than it is enlisted in political struggles serving the working-class interests.

So, if I want to abandon the *position of the goldfish*, "which can easily imagine itself to be swimming in the Atlantic as long it manages to swim without touching the sides" (Schraube & Osterkamp, 2013b, p. 26) I must not only reflect on what is both (therapeutically) effective and emancipatory within the context of the dominantly structured object of my work but also realize and struggle against those forces that currently situate me in the multiply contradictory position of the working class worker/ free-lance entrepreneur in a SCE, who reflects here on what could be reviewed³³ as therapeutic and emancipatory also.

From my perspective, this means that even if I can now/ here be therapeutically accounted as a good/ emancipatory psychotherapist, nothing could guarantee to me, in the context of the basic capitalist contradiction, that the emancipatory psychotherapy I (even cooperatively) trade, will at the same time be good for the socio-political interests of the contemporary working class also. In other words, helping a small part of the contemporary, white proletariat to open up micro-possibilities for action within the dominant capitalist dipoles mentioned in the previous chapter, and to fight it out individually and socio-politically within the context of its "personal social practice" (Dreier, 2009), through the micro-possibilities that I myself respectively open up for myself (and others) as a therapist/ worker/ entrepreneur, in no way ensures that whatever emancipation is achieved within/ through the therapeutic session is not still a psychotherapeutic commodity, of a *differential consumer interest*, serving the interests of a "differential normality" (Marvakis 2019).

B.

Reflecting on the above-mentioned political stake and the dipoles with which this stake is connected, I realize my following reasons and intentions for action: to reconstruct (initially we, the SCE's partners and then jointly with other cooperative or individual initiatives) our psy-practice and our psy-discourse in a direction that will serve the interests of the contemporary working class as a collective social subject, including therapists and treated subjects as well. This means to organize our collectivisation and/ or our antagonisms on the basis of

³³ See the relevant discussion of Pillay (2020).

class consciousness rather than scientific power (e.g. the politically neutral experts vs. the lay treated subjects, diagnosed or not).

The purpose of this nascent practice will be all subjects' emancipation, on the basis of our collective class common interests (as long as on a personal level all subjects suffer more or less from distress/ symptoms, regardless of whether they are attributed a pathologizing diagnosis, or a critical-psychological interpretation of their distress). In other words, rather than being content by providing individual (therapeutic) sessions (or even group sessions for individualized requests), where we offer relief and/ or cultivate a social awareness concerning the relation between psy-problems and society (even through critical-alternative methods), we can develop collective emancipatory activities and processes where we will create new possibilities to overcome societal fears and restrictions (psychologized or material) in order to resist and collectively assert life conditions other than those which produce our distress.

More specifically, in our SCE, we can organise *reflection groups*³⁴, not of a therapeutic/ counselling objective, but with the aim of understanding subjective problems as personal and socio-political as well such as the social self-understanding groups in Berlin, or the Multiloog open meetings in the Netherlands.

These reflection groups will be grassroots groups where subjects participate equally, by jointly choosing the topics and drawing on the power of their knowledge, wherever it comes from (e.g. formal education, personal or collective experience, researching literature, etc.) and could possibly organise activities such as texts writing, journal publishing or events' organising. Such a practice may be one more, *differential* micro-possibility for action, which does not necessarily overturn the socially prefabricated contradictions which (re)produce our practical dilemmas. So, which is the point that micro-possibilities for action could have?

From my perspective, they are actions on a micro-level which can provide a place to develop forms of resistance – c/overt resistance (Schilt, 2003)³⁵ – and which by doing so remind us that "psychotherapy cannot substitute collective struggle; it can only contribute to it, help to empower it" (Llorens, 2009). Micro-possibilities for action seem to me as the minimum necessary way of activation by which we can within the limits of our psy-practice resist societal oppression, reproduce a critical psychological discourse in public and by extension develop new possibilities for action in the context of collective political social movements.

³⁴ To set up such reflection groups, we draw on existing models: The Multiloog open meetings in the Netherlands <http://inca-pa.nl/>, Experts by experience, Self-help groups <https://www.hearingvoices.gr/>, Social self-understanding groups in Berlin <https://www.kritische-psychologie.de/einstieg>.

³⁵ On "I'll resist with every inch and every breath: Girls and zine making as a form of resistance", Schilt defines c/overt resistance as the combination of overt and covert resistance (as defined by Carol Gilligan et al. 1995), highlighting their interconnectedness and the importance of both.

C.

When I realize the dilemmas my first sensation is a choking feeling. The choking softens, softens, softens and even becomes a joy which calls me to move "against the pessimism of reason, for the optimism of action"³⁶. On a first level, for me, action means keeping the dilemmas open. In re-reading them I find that both the treated subjects I meet and we as the three co-authors of this article face similar dilemmas while reflecting on our (therapeutic) process/ practice. I want to be aware of the dilemmas, to seek ways of not covering them up, of opening them up and unravelling them, and so I think I need to move beyond the dominant interpretive schemes. This may mean that:

- I seek to move beyond the univocal reading of individual resilience and embrace resistance as well. I aim directly or indirectly to a therapeutic process/ practice which involves an intersubjective condition into which two subjects resist a change which threatens their autonomy³⁷. This means my resisting the covering up.
- I accept the other person as a responsible being who can take responsibility of his/her own recovery and thus, the pain of resistance acquires a political meaning. The collective experience of pain, especially within a group, opens up a new possibility for action beyond the neoliberal exhortation to happiness which calls for the pain's suppression at its onset and depoliticizes it by turning it into an individualized medical affair.
- I look for alliances, "affinities" (Day, 2004), for momentary points of connection where we meet each other and something happens that is transformative and consistent with our collective ethics of justice-doing (Reynolds, 2011).

I think about all this while recognizing that I am already talking about the ways the dilemmas themselves are emerging in an era where easy answers are proclaimed or even obliged. People, often, especially when experiencing a crisis or fear, ask me for something "to be healed", an "instruction to get through the pain" or a remedy, a diagnosis. I don't see the instruction, the medicine and the diagnosis univocally. If I have a good advice I can give it when someone asks for it. But I find it consistent from an emancipatory perspective to seek ways to see the crisis – which often permeates and fragments any sense of identity and personal formation – in relation to the crisis of the contexts that contain the subjects in question and in relation to my own crisis, which I experience as a professional accompanying (to a certain extent) other subjects on their road to recovery, as a member of a cooperative in crisis, as part of a social crisis (Karatzafiris, 2023). Could this crisis be related to the crisis our group went through while writing this article? I believe so.

³⁶ From the titular book of Franco Basaglia (2008).

³⁷ Gabriel Camarrata (2022) supports that "in mainstream Psychology, [...] the concept of resilience seems to hold, in itself, all that is needed to recover from a crisis, disturbance/violence/abuse, power struggle, while resistance instead is seen as something to dismantle. This approach seems to serve the narrative of a forever resilient and adaptive human being, who at the same time is seen by governments as "so fragile" and "irresponsible" as to have to be controlled at all times for their safety and wellbeing".

I acknowledge that I am part of the world of threats and abuses by which subjects "in sickness" feel oppressed, and the crisis of these subjects is my crisis as well. I need to move to all possible levels. I need to move from the ego to the world, from the "therapeutic relationship" to our relationships within the SCE, from the personal to the political, etc. One action that will light the way is to open up the dilemmas; to discuss the problems that have arisen from our collaboration with each other, to see the political implications of these problems, to self-institute practices and functionalities that serve our needs and transcend the dilemmas. I think of this action, like all the meetings within our SCE, with partners or treated subjects, as a prefiguration of desired worlds³⁸.

However, there seem to be finite limits to action and it is important that these are, to some extent, clear, since they are determined both by our relationship as partners, which is not bound to a tireless and continued political transaction, but also by the limits of the SCE itself as an institutional structure. We are essentially operating within the so-called "third sector where the game is inherently tied to processes that promote (choice) competition between providers" (Speed, 2011). However, during the last 15 years or so that I have been performing the role of a psy-professional from a variety of positions (within the public and private sectors, in NGOs, associations or squats), the anxiety of assimilation has always been there.

In conclusion, it is important for me to be constantly alert to the next set of dilemmas, which I suspect are inherent in the ones I began with: love and death, question and answer, process and purpose, chance and necessity. It is this dialectic of dipoles that the technology-control-security complex threatens to eliminate by ordering the seeking of eternal life and sustainable development, the elimination of ambiguity and of our inherent restriction to fully understand (by imposing algorithmization and artificial intelligence), the subservience of all to the need and purpose of production at the expense of dialogicity and play. In this respect, every crack within the "psychotherapeutic space", every micro-possibility for action could have an impact on the macro-level and let the light in.

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³⁸ According to Richard Day (2008, as cited in Souza, 2015, p.18) social movements are characterised by a "prefigurative politics" where prefiguration is not just a performative process but contributes to the creation of a collective memory. It is much more a form of action that illuminates, signifies and inspires, by its very paradigm, aspects of desired worlds.

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Reflections on right-wing radicalism and emancipation in therapy: A Marxist perspective

Peter Brook

Abstract

This manuscript seeks to make Marxist dialectics accessible to therapists and counselors, while contributing to discussions of Marxist theory within Critical Psychology. It offers a critical reflection on how therapy can engage with far-right political orientations and explores ways to foster emancipatory practices. The text opens with case vignettes that illustrate challenges faced by therapists working with far-right clients. These cases serve as a starting point for a deeper investigation into how political orientations manifest in therapy and how they reflect broader cultural and political limitations. Reflecting on such cases is presented as a pathway to advance emancipatory therapy, regardless of whether therapists encounter far-right clients or not, making this exploration relevant to all therapists seeking to engage with political and cultural dynamics in their practice. Through a historical and theoretical lens, the manuscript examines political orientations as dynamic problems rather than fixed categories, situating them within the broader, unresolved socio-historical task of emancipation. It traces the contradictions inherent in capitalism, emphasizing the need to understand political and economic systems from within their historical contexts. The text argues that left and right political orientations represent the competing forces of societal emancipation and its foreclosure, and that recognizing the transformative failures of past emancipatory movements is crucial for addressing current political crises. The manuscript also critically engages with the societal role of psychology and therapy in shaping human motives, examining how these fields can either adapt individuals to capitalist demands or help them transcend those limitations. The historical evolution of emancipatory concepts in both politics and therapy is explored, highlighting the shifts from 19th-century utopias of individual freedom to contemporary struggles for collective emancipation. Finally, practical recommendations are offered for therapists working with right-wing clients, with an emphasis on fostering critical political consciousness and deepening the therapeutic process in an emancipatory direction. This text argues that a Marxist perspective can offer valuable insights for advancing therapeutic practices and engaging with the broader socio-political challenges of our time.

Keywords

marxist dialectics, emancipatory therapy, far-right, political orientations, desire for agency, therapist-client dynamics, political culture, capitalism and subjectivity, social movements, socialism

Introductory Remarks

This manuscript is written for readers interested in Critical Psychology, as well as therapists and counselors dedicated to fostering emancipation through their practice. It resulted from discussions with colleagues about the difficulties we face as therapists or counselors when we know or assume that our clients hold far-right political orientations. These discussions occurred in various settings, including workplaces, training sessions, research contexts, conferences, and other events dedicated to these issues. Over the past decade, beginning with my initial training during my psychology studies, I have participated in, observed, or initiated these conversations. This period has been long enough to witness a historical shift in these discussions.

Initially, colleagues rarely reported difficulties working with far-right clients, often considering far-right political orientations as relics of the past, rendered obsolete by political progress. Individuals holding far-right views were commonly categorized as people "stuck in the past." However, this perception changed with the success of new far-right parties. Increasingly, colleagues shared their challenges in working with far-right clients, difficulties that could not be easily resolved by reverting to their training. These challenges stem from therapy training and continued education rarely addressing problems arising from conflicting political orientations.

In my observation, therapists committed to emancipation in their work were particularly eager to learn from these difficulties to advance their practice. I share this sentiment and have dedicated myself to investigating these problems as opportunities for advancing emancipatory-intended therapy. However, each time I believed I had found substantial answers, new contradictions soon emerged. Initially, I thought these contradictions indicated my lack of experience since I am relatively early in my career. However, upon discussing them with more experienced therapists, I found that the emergence of new contradictions is a persistent theme, regardless of experience level.

Over the years, influenced by my own political trajectory, I have concluded that we are not merely dealing with issues to be resolved in therapy but with societal contradictions and the broader socio-historical task of emancipation. These issues can only be effectively addressed through collective political action during a time arguably characterized by a lack of broad emancipatory movement. This unusually lengthy manuscript should be seen as a preliminary attempt to understand the tasks these contradictions pose. I hope it serves as a contribution to the ongoing historical self-clarification and furthers this crucial conversation.

If the emergence of the far-right proves one thing, it is the necessity to clarify what emancipation means today—for therapists, counselors, and

psychologists—both within and outside the confines of therapy. This involves understanding political orientations in relation to emancipation, interrogating the historical forces that shape the present moment, and exploring how current predicaments might point toward new possibilities. Although preliminary in many respects, this manuscript aims to contribute to that crucial discussion.

Overview

Before diving into the introduction, I will provide an overview of this manuscript to help orient the reader. Doing so is necessary due to the text's dual goals: making the complex nature of Marxist dialectics accessible to therapists and counselors, while also contributing to the discussion of Marxist theory within Critical Psychology. To this end, manuscript includes summaries of key themes in Marxist thought, crafted to shed light on our current cultural and political predicaments. Writing this text presented the challenge of addressing readers with diverse interests and varying levels of knowledge—some may feel overwhelmed by the complexity, while others may desire more depth and differentiation.

I encourage readers to browse through the manuscript and focus on sections that capture their interest. A table of contents is attached after these introductory remarks. Part one ties together the different themes and arguments of the manuscript, offering a cohesive overview of the text. For those primarily interested in therapeutic practice and less in theory, I recommend Chapter one and part four. Readers unfamiliar with theoretical psychology or Marxist theory may prefer to skip part two initially and return to it later. If part one proves challenging, I suggest moving on to parts three and four after the introduction and revisiting part one afterward.

The **introduction** familiarizes the reader with one of the assumptions of this manuscript that therapy always interacts with culture and politics in contemporary society. This section ends with a brief discussion of **three case vignettes** to illustrate some common problems encountered in therapeutic practice when working with clients from the far right.

Following a reflection on these cases, **part one** will outline the task posed by these problems from a historical and theoretical perspective, explaining how reflecting on cases with far-right clients can advance emancipatory therapy. Since part one ties together the different themes and arguments of the manuscript, I will give a more extended summary of Chapter one and two to help the reader in navigating the manuscript and engage with sections that are particularly relevant to their interest.

Chapter one introduces the key theories and concepts that ground the overall inquiry into how emancipatory therapy can address the challenge of far-right political orientations. Drawing on the theory of political orientations developed by Athanasios Marvakis and linking it with Ute Osterkamp's theory of the desire for agency (further advanced by Morten Nissen), the chapter explores the intersection between subjective knowledge and societal participation. These

theories suggest that political orientations are not simply subjective activities for navigating a preexisting societal order, but rather subjective attempts to pose and clarify the problem of society—what it is and what it ought to be. By addressing the relationship between individual agency and collective societal transformation, along with the desires driving participation in it, this framework opens up possibilities for therapy to contribute to broader emancipatory efforts.

Through tracing historical shifts in the cultural and political understanding of political orientations, the chapter contextualizes the role of political and economic revolutions as well as the rise of modern social sciences, particularly psychology and psychotherapy, in shaping today's understanding of human subjectivity and motivation. Examining the contradictions inherent in industrialized society, especially the psychological problem of motivation, the chapter explores how therapy can harness the potential within these contradictions to foster political autonomy and critical consciousness in civil society, which are essential for emancipation and serve as a counterforce to the far-right.

The chapter also highlights specific challenges that arise when working with far-right clients in therapy, exploring how reflecting on these cases can provide new insights for emancipatory practices. Ultimately, it advocates for a post-psychological perspective that integrates historical and political critique with therapeutic work, emphasizing the need to engage with political orientations and social movements as part of therapy's broader role in civil society.

Chapter two continues to develop the themes introduced in Chapter one by shifting the focus from a psychological lens to a concentrated exploration of the political sphere. Adopting a dialectical approach, it treats the far-right as a problem pointing beyond itself to the political responsibility of the Left. The chapter critically examines conventional distinctions in contemporary political culture and social sciences, exploring the latter's relationship with politics and its role in population control. It suggests that political orientations – whether left or right -must be understood within the broader contradictions of modern politics. Emancipation and opportunism are presented as central, shaping forces in this context.

Chris Cutrone's Marxist hypothesis is introduced as a key methodological framework. In doing so, the chapter outlines the specific Marxist perspective that underpins the entire manuscript. This perspective contrasts with the conventional applications of Marxist theory, particularly in critical social sciences, where it is often employed as a normative social theory. These approaches tend to assume that the Marxist vision of emancipation remains directly applicable (referred to as the 'Marxist wager'). In contrast, the Marxist hypothesis regards emancipation as an unresolved socio-historical task, focusing on how historical revolutionary attempts – despite their failures – have profoundly influenced political culture and the contemporary meaning of emancipation. Reflecting on these failures, the hypothesis provides a framework for addressing challenges faced by present-day emancipatory movements.

Linking these insights to a post-psychological perspective, can generate new ideas about how therapists can learn from cases with far-right clients and

contribute to the development of critical historical consciousness – both within and beyond the therapeutic setting.

Part two explores the themes from part one in greater detail. It begins with discussing potential pathways for therapists to become aware of the limitations of the prevailing political culture. **Chapter three** introduces concepts to view therapists' subjective responses to their encounters with right-wing clients as subjective resources to re-engage with political culture and to move beyond these limitations. Instead of defining political orientations, I suggest understanding political orientations as a problem that requires historical self-clarification. This approach situates political orientations within the unresolved socio-historical problem of emancipation, which arose from capitalism and has shaped modern life ever since.

The subsequent **chapter four** of the problem of capitalism and politics within capitalism argues that these issues cannot be described from the position of a detached observer, as social science often claims, because this would amount to claiming a position outside history. The problem of capitalism can only be understood from within its contradictions and conflicted history, recognizing that past attempts to resolve the problem of capitalism have changed the character of capitalism, often leading to unintended consequences.

I propose situating political orientations in this context as problems of historically changing relations of theory and practice. Building on this, the left and the right are distinguished not sociologically but conceptually from a historical perspective as the embodiment of societal emancipation or the foreclosure of it.

Chapter five concludes with investigating political orientation in the context of the problem of motivation. It discusses the societal role of psychology and therapy in directing motives to satisfy individual needs through the adaptation to the needs of capital. This analysis is juxtaposed with the emergence of motives that transcend the capitalist reality of false necessities of conflicting but real needs. The final section connects these insights to psychology and therapy, highlighting pathways how these historical and theoretical perspectives can advance emancipatory – intended therapeutic practice.

Part three starts by delving into the historical foundations of contemporary concepts of emancipation in psychotherapy and politics, examining the emergence, crisis, and transformation of modern utopias of freedom. **Chapter six** traces the rise and decline of the utopia of the free bourgeois individual and explains how its crisis in the mid-19th century gave way to a new vision: the utopia of the social individual. This exploration leads to a critical examination of the new societal conditions brought about by the industrial revolution, which have shaped modern politics, given rise to new emancipatory movements, and profoundly transformed the modern ideals of freedom. I argue that the political right can be understood as a response to this situation, embodying the subjective moment (both a force and a period) of the societal process that is opposed to universal mass emancipation.

Finally, I will offer in **chapter seven** four recommendations for working with right-wing oriented clients, drawing on theories from Critical Psychology.

These recommendations can also be valuable in cases where other political orientations emerge as conflicts or problems that disrupt the therapeutic process. Even if practitioners rarely encounter explicit tensions between their own political orientations and those of the client, reflecting on such situations may inspire new approaches to addressing political orientations in therapy, potentially expanding their practice in an emancipatory direction – this is my hope. Additionally, readers are encouraged to critically engage with these recommendations, as this may help clarify their own ideas and assumptions about the possibilities and limitations of therapy with emancipatory intentions.

Overall, this manuscript aims to demonstrate that a Marxist perspective can offer valuable insights into addressing the challenges encountered in therapeutic work with right-wing oriented individuals. This perspective, rooted in a specific interpretation of Marxist theory, may not be shared by everyone. It is not necessary to agree with the Marxist standpoint from which I am writing to generate insights from reading this manuscript when seen as an attempt to contribute to the emancipatory understanding of contemporary issues.

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Limitations

This manuscript has several limitations, reflecting its preliminary nature. Three, in particular, must be briefly discussed to set clear expectations: the absence of a thorough definition of fascism and the far-right; the limited treatment of sexism, racism, and other forms of discrimination predating the industrial revolution; and the lack of an explicit discussion on different Marxist approaches.

First, concerning the definition of fascism, the manuscript does not engage with the extensive debates on how to define and distinguish fascism from the far-right. These discussions—both within and outside of the social sciences—are deeply influenced by the political orientations of those involved in them. While these debates are important, I have chosen not to explore them in detail here, as they would require a separate and substantial treatment. Moreover, these discussions often center on categorization schemes and do not sufficiently examine the role such schemes play in shaping subjective political orientations. The focus of this manuscript is on political orientations as subjective phenomena rather than on specific types of such orientations. I address far-right political orientations because they foreground the issue of political orientation itself.

However, for those interested, a longer footnote in chapter three briefly outlines my position on distinguishing fascism from the far-right.

I think that the problems of sexism, racism, and other forms of oppression that predate the industrial revolution, are of central importance for the task of emancipation, particularly given the historical weight of issues such as women's oppression, aptly described by Juliet Mitchell (1966) as 'the longest revolution'. However, this manuscript focuses on contributing to the broader effort of overcoming the current limitations in political culture, which would require an extensive discussion of these forms of oppression to be fully addressed. Adopting contemporary approaches to these issues would be insufficient because how these issues are typically framed in political culture reflects general limitations in political culture. The Marxist perspective I follow, offers a methodological approach to these concerns¹. A brief discussion of these issues can be found in section 4.7.

Lastly, this manuscript does not delve into an explicit discussion of different Marxist approaches. This is partly because such a discussion would require a breadth of expertise beyond my scope. Nonetheless, chapter two outlines the specific Marxist perspective that informs my writing, contrasting it with other Marxist traditions. The manuscript does not claim to exhaustively cover all Marxist approaches, but it does engage with the Marxist hypothesis as a critical methodological framework for understanding political orientations and their implications for therapy.

Note on Sources Cited from Chris Cutrone's Works

At the time of writing, several works by Chris Cutrone cited throughout this manuscript were only available online or in socialist publications that I could not access in print. Consequently, direct quotations from these sources do not include page numbers, as they were drawn from digital versions without consistent pagination. These works have since been collected and published in *Marxism and Politics: Essays on Critical Theory and the Party 2006–2024*. For consistency and to maintain the context of the original research, I have retained references to the online versions. Readers are encouraged to consult the print edition where page numbers are now available.

¹ Chris Cutrone (2010b) noted, to approach the issue of opening possibilities for gender and sexual practices globally, it's crucial to address *capital as the fundamental and global context*. In the distorted forms of current gender and sexual phenomena, there are latent possibilities for becoming human in ways barely imaginable today. Mitchell's essay from over 40 years ago cautions against letting present discontents take static forms and warns of the normative principles we might propose against destructive practices we wish to overcome. It's essential to *grasp the 'movement of becoming' in capital* that must be transformed, from the breakdown of tradition to the false re-establishment of tradition in response to modernity, into a genuine human achievement of emancipation.

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Introduction

Critical Psychology and emancipatory approaches to psychotherapy emphasize that the traditional view of psychotherapy as an apolitical practice is an ideological construction, distorting both the history of psychotherapy and the reality of what therapists actually do in their practice (Dreier 2008; Goulart 2019; Knebel 2021; Nissen 2019; Osterkamp 1991b, 1991a). The complex relationship between psychotherapy and politics can be understood through several dimensions, including how therapy engages with political processes, applies therapeutic concepts to political life, and reflects power dynamics within the profession itself (Totton 2000). Additionally, the history of psychotherapy reveals how deeply intertwined it has always been with political contexts, despite efforts to present it as an apolitical practice. This history is vividly illustrated by the tragic trajectory of the early psychoanalytic movement: Freud, often seen as conservative, was nonetheless animated by the Enlightenment spirit, advocating for psychoanalysis as a tool for personal and social emancipation. The left Freudians sought to radicalize this spirit through their involvement in revolutionary Marxism, aiming to further the cause of emancipation. In stark contrast, the right-wing of the psychoanalytic movement co-opted with Nazism, actively persecuting its Jewish members and purging psychoanalysis of its 'Jewishness' to establish a 'German' psychotherapy (Dahmer 1997, 2012; Geuter 1984; Peglau 2013). The crisis of professionalization for these early psychoanalysts was not merely a matter of status or regulation; it was a life-threatening struggle against political forces that sought to undermine and co-opt their work.

This historical entanglement underscores the ideological construction of psychotherapy as separate from politics, obscuring the reality of how therapeutic practices are influenced by and contribute to political structures and ideologies. Moreover, the ongoing crisis of psychotherapy, particularly in the context of professionalization, highlights the tensions that arise when therapy is positioned as a profession on par with medicine and law (Totton 2000). This professionalization has led to increased regulation and the commodification of therapy, mirroring broader societal conflicts that have historically shaped the "troubled person industries," which emerged as mechanisms for managing

societal conflicts and discontents within the welfare state (Cohen 2016; Dörner 1969; Frawley 2024; Gusfield 1989; Moncrieff 2022). The story of Edward Bernays, Freud's nephew, who pioneered public relations by applying psychoanalytic concepts to manipulate public opinion, exemplifies how psychoanalysis, in its quest for professionalization, became entangled in the very problems it sought to address. Understanding these political dimensions is crucial for comprehending the true nature of psychotherapy and its role in society in addressing societal and political malaise, as it navigates the pressures of professionalization while grappling with its inherent political implications.

Consequently, Critical Psychology and emancipatory approaches to therapy have emphasized that psychotherapy is inherently political because it deals with human experience, which is always shaped by social, cultural, and political contexts. Therapists, consciously or unconsciously, bring their own political beliefs into the therapy room, influencing how they understand and interact with clients. Thus, psychotherapy inevitably both reflects and influences political structures and ideologies.

Emancipatory critiques have not only challenged the apolitical view of therapy but also argued that political awareness is essential for ethical and effective therapeutic practice. By recognizing the political dimensions of therapy, therapists can better support their clients in navigating the complexities of their lives, which are invariably influenced by broader social and political forces. However, an open question remains: how should political awareness be advanced for emancipatory therapy to move forward (Knebel 2018, 2019)? Answering this question requires clarifying the meaning of emancipation – a task that is far from straightforward. Emancipation is not only a politically contested topic but is also shaped by the prevailing political culture, influencing what emancipation is and what it can be in a utopian sense. Therefore, it is crucial to explore how the intricate relationship between different political orientations and emancipation is mediated by political culture.

For this inquiry to be truly relevant to advancing therapy, however, it must be grounded in the specific, historically rooted problems that therapists encounter in their practice. Critical Psychology has long emphasized the importance of theorizing the concrete problems that arise in psychological practice, a focus central to what is known as practice research². This approach not only seeks to clarify the inherent contradictions in these problems but also to understand them within the context of collective subjectivities – such as research or practice communities – which are seen as part of the broader societal process³. By exploring these contradictions, practitioners and researchers aim to foster a deeper understanding how to shape the societal process in more conscious and emancipatory ways, thereby addressing the deeper issues that modern life

² Advancing practice by theorizing concrete problems that psychologists encounter in their work, is a well-established topic in Critical Psychology, discussed under the rubric of practice research (Dege 2023; Dreier 2008; Held 2020; Holzkamp 1983; Knebel 2021; Langemeyer 2011; Markard 2009; Nissen 2012).

³ Articulating this perspective is a more recent development within Critical Psychology (Axel and Højholt 2019; Dreier 2019; González Rey 2019b; González Rey and Mitjáns Martínez 2017, 2019; Højholt and Kousholt 2020; Mørck 2010; Nissen 2000, 2006, 2009, 2018, 2023; Nissen and Mørck 2019; Wengemuth and Waleng in press).

presents. The central task is to theorize how these contradictions are interconnected with efforts to overcome practical challenges, ultimately contributing to a more conscious and emancipatory participation in the societal process, which is after all constituted and re-constituted through subjective activities. Thus, this approach can be contrasted with looking for quick and instrumental solutions to these problems,

Drawing on these approaches, this manuscript suggests that encounters with far-right clients in therapy present a unique opportunity to advance emancipatory practices in therapy. These encounters foreground the role of political orientations in therapy, revealing the conflictual nature of these orientations and how they reflect the broader despair within contemporary political culture. Therapists' subjective responses to their encounters of far-right clients not only mirror a despair within political culture but also embody efforts to overcome it. The political orientation of right-wing radicals is seen in the prevailing political culture not only as undesirable but also as a powerful threat. Calls to actions across the political spectrum, defining the rise of the far-right as crisis, demand that the democratic spectrum must defend itself against the threat of the far-right establishing a fourth Reich (Rosenfeld 2019), suggest mostly means of social control in lack emancipatory answers.

The inadequacy of current emancipatory answers to societal and political malaise, as evidenced by the success of the far-right underscores the need to move beyond the prevailing limitations of political culture. In this context, the common assumption that categorizes individuals' political orientations into rigid labels like left and right – equating the left with emancipation and the right with anti-emancipation – must be carefully reconsidered. By consciously addressing the political and cultural dynamics at play, and exploring therapists' subjective efforts to transcend these limitations, encounters with far-right clients can be transformed into opportunities to advance emancipatory therapy and deepening our understanding of political orientations – within and beyond the context of therapy. However, this requires a specific and thoughtful approach to how such encounters interfere with the therapeutic process.

Encounters with far-right clients have the potential of disrupting the everyday work routine of therapists, presenting them with problems of orientation. Questions like 'What does this mean?' and 'What should I do now?' arise as therapists navigate these unsettling situations. To unfold such encounters as opportunities to transcend the limits of current political culture, we must resist the temptation to treat them as problems to be resolved by simply finding the next step in the therapeutic process, or by defaulting to actions aimed at continuing therapy as usual. Instead, I suggest we theorize and historicize our responses – such as the desire to change, control, or ignore the far-right political orientation through technical means – to transform these encounters into open problems of orientation, holding the potential to reveal new and unforeseen ways to advance emancipatory therapy. This potential is particularly strong in encounters where therapists are committed to emancipatory practices or are otherwise deeply concerned about the rise of the far-right.

The following case vignettes illustrate some of the common problems therapists encounter when working with clients from the far right. These cases provide concrete examples of how political orientations can interfere with therapeutic practice, serving as an entry point to explore the broader themes of this manuscript. Through these vignettes, we begin to unpack how these challenging situations hold the potential for therapists to critically engage with political orientations, using these encounters not only to navigate but also to transcend the limitations of the prevailing political culture. They offer a starting point for reflecting on how emancipatory practices might be advanced in therapy by drawing on the experience of working with far-right cases.

Three Case Vignettes

The following case vignettes are based on my clinical work experiences and qualitative interviews conducted during a research project at the Medical School of Brandenburg. The results of this project, carried out by my colleague Frank Schumann and me, will be published separately. The cases presented here, while grounded in real experiences, are not empirical data interpretations from the project but have been assembled to illustrate typical problems and questions encountered when working with far-right clients.

Vignette 1

The first case vignette involves a systemic therapist in training who identifies as a lesbian with a queer feminist political orientation. She is highly concerned about the potential rise of fascism, interpreting the current right-wing shift through this lens. She assesses her prior knowledge of right-wing extremism as rather limited. The vignette reflects on her work during an eight-week inpatient therapy setting in a psychosomatic clinic in Thuringia (a federal state in eastern Germany), discussing her interactions with a male client in his mid-30s, whose father was violent.

The client is financially dependent on his family of origin and has been diagnosed with depression and alcohol abuse. He confides in the therapist about his involvement in a neo-Nazi scene but expresses a desire to distance himself from it. He states that he disclosed his political orientation and his desire to change because he trusts her. Throughout the therapeutic process, the therapist often feels threatened by the client's homophobic comments, who is unaware that his therapist identifies as a lesbian. For the therapist, the client's desire to distance himself from his previous affiliations is crucial for her ability to continue working with him after she learns about his far-right convictions.

In the therapeutic process, the therapist and client develop a shared understanding of the problem, viewing violence as a learned coping mechanism. They reframe the client's depression as an opportunity to develop alternative conflict resolution strategies. The therapist involves the station's social worker to

explore specialized support services designed for individuals seeking to leave far-right organizations and subcultures. The therapy is assessed as progressing well, with the client expressing a desire to distance himself from his family of origin. However, upon discharge, the client rejects contact with the professional support services for leaving far-right groups. Reflecting retrospectively, the therapist questions whether she might have sugarcoated the client's political orientation to be able to work with him and acknowledges her lack of background knowledge.

Reflecting on this case, several conclusions can be drawn. The therapist effectively used systemic concepts to collaboratively develop a connection between the client's therapeutic issues and his political orientation. The therapist's feminist orientation introduced an emancipatory perspective, enabling a focus on change and envisioning a pathway out of the far-right convictions. Her interpretation of current political developments as potentially leading to a resurgence of fascism and her own positioning undoubtedly influenced the process. However, she was unable to reflect on this influence due to a lack of opportunities for self-clarification, such as inter- or supervision or further education. Additionally, it cannot be ruled out that the client was strategically acting to gain sympathy and ultimately make himself fit again for the far-right scene.

Vignette 2

The second case vignette involves a male psychiatrist with a psychodynamic orientation. He is highly experienced in his profession and has a pronounced humanistic perspective. With a deep interest in critical theory, he continuously educates himself about contemporary far-right organizations and their strategies. This commitment began in his youth, which he spent in left-wing subculture. The setting for this vignette involves six weeks of outreach treatment as part of psychosocial health services in Mecklenburg-Western Pomerania, a federal state in the north-east of Germany.

The client is a woman in her late 20s, unemployed, and living in what the psychiatrist describes as a "Nazi house." She resides there with a partner of the same age who works as an electrician. She has been diagnosed with agoraphobia, which renders her unable to leave the house, making her eligible for outreach treatment. She is frequently visited by three male friends of the couple, who are in their mid-20s to early 30s and live in a shared flat in the same house. They try to support the client by running errands since she would otherwise be alone during the day.

The therapist infers her right-wing orientation from scene-specific symbols on the T-shirts that the friends and her partner wear. When he questions the client about it, she downplays the significance, claiming they are simply football fans and that such T-shirts are common. Despite her explanations, the therapist remains skeptical but is nonetheless surprised by the friendliness and helpfulness of her friends.

Throughout the therapy sessions, the psychiatrist searches for evidence of an authoritarian character in the client but reaches no clear conclusions. He maintains a professional distance, failing to develop a sustainable and trustful therapeutic relationship. Instead, the relationship is shaped by mutual distrust. The therapist does not engage in a collaborative exploration of the client's political orientation and is unable to link his assumptions about her political stance with the therapeutic issues and her concerns. In reflection, he acknowledges that he may not have met the standards he set for his therapeutic practice.

Here are my conclusions regarding this case: The therapist identified the client's political orientation through his background knowledge. However, it appears that his familiarity with critical theory might have complicated his therapeutic efforts. While it is not unreasonable to assume that the client held a right-wing orientation, the therapist did not explore the specifics of this orientation or the context in which the client depended on others. His assumptions seemed to have eclipsed the real person in front of him. Consequently, the therapist struggled to apply theoretical assumptions from the theory of the authoritarian character, such as relational disturbances, to the therapeutic problem in a way that advanced the therapeutic process. Furthermore, he was unaware of the dynamics that labeling the situation as involving an authoritarian character had on the therapeutic process, which I discussed earlier in the introduction regarding problem formation. Additionally, the therapist lacked an explicit emancipatory perspective in his work.

Critical theory, which often emphasizes the decline of emancipatory possibilities in social developments post the failure of the Russian Revolution through Stalinization, does not provide direct practical guidance for therapeutic contexts. This raises the question: Which theories are actually helpful, and which might even be hindrances? In my opinion, the direct application of social criticism, such as critical theory, in therapeutic work is questionable. This does not mean to deny the value of critical theory but to recognize the difference between critical theory and therapeutic practice. Theory must not be used as a justification for practice.

Vignette 3

Case vignette 3 is ideal-typical, not drawn from interviews. We developed it from a literature analysis. Fortunately, we did not find such problems in our interviews, and we were quite surprised not to find them: Namely, the phenomenon of politicizing psychological orientation. This is more commonly found in the literature and is often psychodynamically oriented. In the ideal-typical case vignette, the setting is outpatient individual therapy, and clients with left-wing, right-wing extremist, and Islamist orientations are lumped together. Here, extremism theory serves as the common thread. Political orientations are interpreted as defense mechanisms, with the assumption that they are used to cope with ego weakness. The specific orientation is considered irrelevant, and the

identification of an “extremist” orientation is done intuitively as a deviation from norms, as there are no substantive criteria. The assumption is often that extremist orientations arise from authoritarian need frustration in childhood. This working hypothesis is not disclosed in the therapeutic process, but the focus of the intervention is on reparenting or corrective emotional experiences.

Case vignette 3 revolves around the psychologization of political orientation. This vignette is not drawn from interviews but based on a literature analysis of the mentioned research project (Schumann, Brook, and Heinze 2022). Interestingly, we did not encounter such problems in our interviews, which was surprising. The psychologization of political orientations is more commonly discussed in the literature, often from a psychodynamic perspective. In this case vignette, the setting is outpatient individual therapy, and clients with left-wing, right-wing extremist, and Islamist orientations are grouped together under the umbrella of extremism theory.

In this scenario, political orientations are interpreted as defense mechanisms, presumed to be coping strategies for dealing with ego weakness. This assumption is loosely inspired by the psychoanalytic aspect of the theory of the authoritarian personality, while neglecting the social criticism of that theory (Adorno et al. 1950). The specific political orientation is deemed irrelevant, and left- and right-wing orientations are not distinguished. Identifying an “extremist” orientation is done intuitively as a deviation from norms, without substantive criteria. The prevailing assumption is that extremist orientations stem from authoritarian need frustration in childhood. This working hypothesis is not disclosed during the therapeutic process; instead, the intervention focuses on reparenting or providing corrective emotional experiences.

Here are some of my conclusions about this case vignette. The reasons for therapy, the concerns, and the problems addressed in therapy are superficially connected to the political orientation, following a rather formulaic approach predetermined by theory. This poses the risk of self-immunization against criticism if therapy outcomes are lacking. One could always argue that the therapy did not progress or work because the defense mechanisms were too strong.

There is no emancipatory perspective here, just an adaptation to prevailing norms. However, implicitly or dialectically viewed, an emancipatory perspective exists within this framework, but one must read the literature against the grain. In psychoanalytic theory, there is the idea of the autonomous bourgeois individual who can assert themselves against authoritarian structures and critically evaluate societal norms. While this is not a bad utopia, it is unrealistic under capitalist conditions, as I will elaborate.

Additionally, the theoretical foundations of this concept, the theory of extremism as a version of the theory of totalitarianism, are not critically examined, which has political consequences. Consequently, we see a psychologization and therapeutization of deviant political orientations. However, deviant political orientations can also be emancipatory, but no distinction is made here. Furthermore, there are possible misjudgments of political orientation, as substantive knowledge of political orientations is deemed irrelevant – for

instance, distinguishing between emancipatory and reactionary orientations. Ultimately, this reflects a technocratic understanding of psychotherapy as a social technology for adaptation.

Interim reflection

A brief reflection on the three case vignettes is necessary. In each example, far-right political orientations were viewed as problematic and thus became a focus of therapeutic intervention. However, the reasons for categorizing these orientations as problematic were neither fully articulated nor explicitly reflected upon. Instead, these judgments remained largely implicit, shaped by the therapists' own political orientations and broader political culture. In particular, the therapists tended to frame political orientations as personal identities rather than understanding them as contradictory phenomena – though the first case offered some nuance. Here, the far-right orientation was collaboratively defined by the therapist and client as a set of conflicting motives embedded in violent conduct. This process facilitated the cultivation of new motives toward resolving conflicts more peacefully. Yet, whether these motivations were realized in the client's everyday life remains uncertain. Even in this more nuanced case, the framing of political orientation as identity is still dominant.

It is important to recognize that therapists' categorization of clients' political orientations as problematic does not merely reflect cultural norms but also expresses the therapist's own subjective relationship to those norms. Though individual therapists do not simply reproduce dominant political horizons, their efforts to address therapeutic challenges are often shaped by the prevailing political imagination. This is especially evident in therapy cases involving far-right clients, where political culture strongly influences the formation of problems within therapy.

For instance, in the first case, the therapist's concerns were influenced by an inability to envision progressive societal change – an attitude shaped by an apocalyptic strand of contemporary political imagination, which situates Germany on the verge of another 1933 and anticipates a fascist resurgence. In the second case, the psychiatrist's clear-cut views of far-right orientations reflected a broader political culture that treats political identities as fixed, erasing the fluid, socially embedded nature of political orientations. This perspective overshadowed the client's subjective political stance, leading the psychiatrist to focus solely on his own convictions rather than confronting the societal dynamics at play.

Thus, emancipatory therapy should not limit itself to cultivating meta-motivation – the motivation to change one's motivation – aimed at revising clients' far-right orientations. Instead, the primary task lies in reexamining and potentially revising our own political orientations. This does not mean substituting therapy with politics, but rather establishing a foundation for the development of meta-motivation within therapy through the deepening of our own orientations and political understandings. Doing so offers a more nuanced

grasp of problem formation within therapy, which, as I aim to show, often appears in reified forms.

In the following chapters, we will delve deeper into the nature of political orientations, problem formation, and the potential for therapy to engage with these issues in a more nuanced and transformative way.

Part one

Chapter 1: Political Orientations and the Psychology of Agency: Historical Shifts and Emancipatory Possibilities

Political orientations are a subjective form of knowledge (*Erkenntnis*), a specific personal understanding of and insight into the relationship between individual subjects and the societal process (Marvakis 1996). These subjects can be both individual persons and collectives. Collective subjects – such as families, political parties, social movements, corporations, or workforces – are composed of individuals who participate in them (Nissen 2023:130–42). The purpose of the knowledge expressed through political orientations is to expand or preserve agency by guiding individuals in their ‘conscious’ engagement with society. However, political orientations are not merely about adaptation; they reflect how subjects understand and attempt to transform the societal challenges they face, articulating both how society is and how it ought to be (Marvakis 1996:53–78).

Athanasios Marvakis distinguished political orientations by their “object of reference [...] as particular anticipations and alignments concerning social relations. In a preliminary definition, ‘my’ political orientations can be understood as subjective references to social relations. In other words, ‘my’ political orientations express ‘my’ relationship to these social relations in a subjective way. Political orientations, from the perspective of the orienting subjects, are perspectival references to social relations, to ‘society as a whole’” (Marvakis 1996:54). To fully grasp this definition, it is essential to explore its components and contextualize them historically. The subsequent discussion of Enlightenment ideas will broaden the understanding of political orientations as subjective attempts to clarify the modern problem of society.

From the perspective of the orienting subject, ‘society as a whole’ refers to something greater than the sum of its individual parts – it encompasses the broader societal interconnectedness that underpins the lives of individual subjects. It is the world in which subjects live and continuously reproduce through their actions (Adorno 1965). Subjects must reflect on the possibilities and problems of this world, not as isolated issues but as potential constraints, pitfalls, and opportunities, which they must anticipate and align with to preserve or expand their own agency. Whether individuals or collectives, subjects need to adjust their course of life to align with the development tendencies of the world they inhabit, anticipating how the societal future might shape their agency.

1.1. Society as Subjective Problem of Orientation

‘Society as a whole’ is not merely an object for subjects; it represents a subjective problem of orientation, requiring the practical knowledge embedded in political orientations. This involves determining how to anticipate and align one’s course of life with historical developments that are both beyond the immediate control of individual subjects and shaped by collective subjective activity. Therefore, political orientations are neither innate attributes of subjects nor the direct result of socialization, but subjective practices that reflect the interconnected development of individual subjects, the societal process, and their conscious participation in this process. Moreover, the necessity of anticipating societal relations introduces a temporal dimension to political orientations: the interconnectedness of society and history.

Problems of orientation can be categorized as having either clear and distinct (closed) meanings or problematic and open ones (Marvakis 1996:38–50). Political orientations are relevant only to the latter. Problems with clear and distinct meanings can have uncontested solutions, while those with problematic and open meanings must be resolved normatively, with their resolutions potentially subject to contestation and conflict. For example (*ibid.*, 38f), navigating from point A to point B in an unfamiliar city is a clear task with a distinct meaning, even though it can be approached using various methods (maps, internet, asking strangers) and different routes (short, convenient, scenic, etc.). However, this problem can become problematic if one critiques the city’s design – whether it is car-friendly or pedestrian-friendly – shifting the task from a clear and distinct problem to an open question. In such a case, it remains unclear what the subject will do with this critique – if they act on it at all – as the criticism could serve an entirely different purpose. Another example of an orientation problem with a problematic and open meaning would be encountering a far-right client in therapy. There is no uncontested solution, and the therapist’s approach depends on their political orientation. However, as with the previous example, this problem could also be transformed into the opposite type – one with a clear and distinct (closed) meaning.

The meaning or significance of orientation problems, such as encountering a far-right client, can be approached through technical reasoning or through open inquiry into the nature and history of the problem. Therapists may choose to interpret the encounter “in the sense of instrumental reasoning for optimizing the subsequent execution of action” (Marvakis 1996:49). This reduces the encounter to a discrete, isolated problem, solvable by technical means and specific actions designed to achieve a predetermined goal: continuing therapy (and life) as usual. In this approach, the technical knowledge and methods required appear external to the problem itself, creating divisions between theory and practice, content and method, and the ‘what’ and ‘how’ of action (Schraube and Marvakis 2019). These divisions are reflected in the question: ‘What theory or technique can be applied?’ As a result, the therapist’s personal relationship to the problem is treated as a mere disturbance in routine; what the encounter could mean beyond being an obstacle is largely irrelevant. The task posed by the encounter becomes

a predetermined goal: either to continue work as usual or to transform the far-right convictions of the client into a more socially acceptable political orientation.

However, such an instrumental approach is likely to unconsciously perpetuate broader societal conflicts mirrored in the encounter. As Marvakis (1996:49) notes, human “reasoning is not merely about solving problems but fundamentally about posing them. It strives for ‘comprehensive understanding’ rather than just ‘guiding [instrumental] knowledge’ (Holzkamp 1973, Chap. 8; Seidel 1976, p. 16). Human thought and action are not confined to task-oriented actions; they actively engage in setting goals”. Regarding political orientations, this suggests that these orientations are not merely subjective activities aimed at navigating a preexisting societal order but are subjective attempts to pose and clarify the problem of society – what ‘it’ is and how it ought to be. As Marvakis (1996:45) explains, subjective “orientation within (collective) activity” in the societal process necessarily raises “the (orientation-relevant) question of the relationship between individual and collective goals/interests”. These goals/interests are not limited to preexisting directives but emerge historically from subjective participation in the societal process. This also implies that political orientations include knowledge about how others, such as far-right clients, pose and clarify the problem of society from their perspective.

Society and its development – history – cannot be directly observed from our limited perspectives in everyday life. It can only be understood through concepts that represent the abstract relations of ‘society as a whole’. The subjective knowledge embedded in political orientations is never entirely private but rooted in the meaning-making resources of political culture (Marvakis 1996:50–53). These concepts are not necessarily theoretical but include a broad range of symbolic representations such as myths, stories, collective memories of historical events, and metaphors, which serve as resources to navigate the contradictions of everyday life. They do not merely describe what society is or was; they also anticipate how it ought to be in the future (Marvakis 1996:54–60). Rooted in political culture, these representations are collectively produced and contested in struggles over societal influence. They reflect different political orientations, each expressing more or less conflicting visions of how society should be organized and how societal problems should be addressed.

It is important to recognize that ‘society as a whole’ is not identical with the theories produced by the social sciences (Marvakis 1996). These theories represent only a small fraction of the broader cultural representations developed throughout modern history to make sense of the conditions of modern existence. Concepts like nation-state, democracy, social contract, constitution, constitutional rights, civil society, popular sovereignty, class struggle, capitalism, human rights, progress and regress, self-determination, the people, the nation, the welfare state, and the republic are just a few examples that have shaped not only intellectual discourse but have also become deeply embedded in political movements and public consciousness. These key terms help individuals and collectives engage with and understand society and its governance, influencing political action and shaping the modern world. In addition to these more global concepts, there exists

a wide variety of localized and idiosyncratic symbolic expressions that serve as more or less unique cultural representations of society. None of these terms remain static, as the ‘object’ of society is an ongoing process unfolding through history. In fact, the concept of society itself emerged alongside the recognition of history as the historicity of humanity, which superseded religious conceptions of time (Adorno 1965; Preuss 1986).

1.2. Labor, Society, and Freedom: The Enlightenment’s Transformative Vision

All of these concepts emerged from the broader Enlightenment conception of modern society⁴ and history, marking a radical departure from earlier notions of social organization rooted in eternal hierarchies, such as systems of castes or estates (Cutrone 2013a). Enlightenment thinkers like Jean-Jacques Rousseau used the idea of ‘society’ both as a critique of the old feudal order and as a vision of freedom through collective and individual self-transformation. This concept aimed to address the modern problem of freedom by balancing personal autonomy with the necessity for a cohesive societal structure that supports collective emancipation and the moral and political development of individuals. Kant (1784a) famously defined Enlightenment as humanity’s liberation from “self-imposed immaturity” and subservience to authority. Rather than being seen as a single event, the Enlightenment was viewed as a historical task driven by the development of critical reasoning, whose collective cultivation was closely tied to the problem of modern freedom and the concept of society.

In *On the Social Contract*, Rousseau (1762) develops the concept of the ‘general will,’ expressing the idea that society is more than the sum of its parts, acting as a collective force that shapes both individual freedom and societal progress. While society is a creation of human will, Rousseau argues that it also imposes its own constraints and possibilities, reflecting both subjective and objective dimensions. Unlike Hobbes’ *Leviathan*, which seeks to tame the “war of all against all,” Rousseau envisions society as a force for collective self-transformation. Hegel’s (1807, 1820) concept society of as “a ‘second nature’, a

⁴ The Enlightenment’s conception of modern society is deeply rooted in the works of key figures such as Adam Smith, John Locke, Benjamin Constant, Jean-Jacques Rousseau, and Montesquieu. Adam Smith’s *The Wealth of Nations* underscores how individual self-interest and labor drive economic progress, reflecting a shift towards a society where economic activity is central to personal and collective advancement. Similarly, John Locke’s *Two Treatises of Government* articulates the importance of natural rights and the social contract, framing modern society as one built on individual freedoms and collective governance. Benjamin Constant’s *The Liberty of the Ancients Compared with that of the Moderns* contrasts the active political participation of ancient societies with the individual liberties central to modernity, emphasizing the transformative impact of Enlightenment thought on concepts of freedom and societal organization. Jean-Jacques Rousseau’s *The Social Contract* introduces the concept of the general will, asserting that true freedom is achieved through collective self-determination rather than individual interests alone. Rousseau’s vision of society as an embodiment of the collective will challenges the notion that freedom is merely the absence of constraints, proposing instead that it involves active participation in the formation of societal norms and governance. Montesquieu’s *The Spirit of the Laws* contributes to this discourse by exploring how different forms of government – republican, monarchical, and despotic – affect societal stability and the protection of freedoms. His analysis of the separation of powers and checks and balances provides a foundational framework for understanding how modern democratic institutions can manage the tension between liberty and authority.

rebirth of potential, both collectively and individually. [According to Rousseau,] human nature found the realization of its freedom in society, but humans were free to develop and transform themselves, for good or ill” (Cutrone 2013a). Recognizing this radical ambivalence of societal freedom, Rousseau had no illusions about the difficult task that the problem of society posed. He believed society represented unprecedented possibilities for both emancipation and barbarism. For Rousseau, an emancipatory response to this duality required that “society had to be clear about its aims, in practice as well as in theory” (Cutrone 2013a). This clarity is crucial because reflecting on societal practices – whether political, moral, or institutional – is only possible “from within the conditions of ‘second nature’ that express our condition of freedom – including our self-imposed conditions of unfreedom” (ibid.).

For Enlightenment radicals like Rousseau (1755, 1762), Kant (1784b), and Hegel (1807, 1820), transforming society from within the conditions of ‘second nature’ was understood as a dynamic interplay between society as both a subjective and objective force. As a subjective force, society expresses humanity’s historical realization that it can transform itself through political and moral action. At the same time, society is also an objective force resulting from the accumulation and condensation of prior subjective activity. As an objective force, society can both constrain and foster the subjective capacity for moral and political action guided by enlightened reasoning. For these thinkers and the political radicals influenced by their ideas, the task was to understand and consciously appropriate the emancipatory potential they saw inherent in society as this dynamic between subjective and objective forces. Appropriating this potential required understanding society’s objective force as a product of historically unresolved and accumulated problems stemming from prior subjective actions. As a result, they viewed social problems – such as the lack of critical reasoning or social inequality – not as isolated issues, but as interconnected expressions of what society is and what it ought to become.

The Enlightenment view of the problem of freedom marks a profound historical transformation, as noted by Benjamin Constant (1819) in *The Liberty of the Ancients Compared with that of the Moderns*. It represents a significant shift from the feudal order, where social roles were fixed and divinely ordained, and from ancient Greece and Rome, where freedom meant that⁵ “that society had complete authority over its members” (ibid., 9). This stands in stark contrast to the modern understanding, in which labor and freedom are central to both individual and collective transformation. Constant famously argued that modern society, through commerce, could achieve the benefits of ancient liberty – such as collective well-being and societal cohesion – without the need for war. Commerce provided a way for modern societies to achieve the same levels of

⁵“The liberty of the ancients consisted in carrying out collectively but directly many parts of the over-all functions of government, coming together in the public square to discuss and make decisions about war and peace; form alliances with foreign governments; vote on new laws; pronounce judgments; examine the accounts, acts, and stewardship of the magistrates; call the magistrates to appear in front of the assembled people; accuse the magistrates and then condemn or acquit them. But while the ancients called this liberty, they saw no inconsistency between this collective freedom and the complete subjection of the individual to the authority of the group” (Constant 1819:2).

influence and interconnectedness that ancient societies pursued through war and conquest. Like other liberals of his time Benjamin Constant “considered war to be, not merely the failure of politics, but a crime. Unlike for the Ancients who celebrated war, indeed as among the highest of values, after every modern war people search for who was criminally culpable for the regrettable catastrophe” (Cutrone 2014a).

Within the Enlightenment context, labor emerges as a universal force that mediates and transforms society, as reflected in the work of John Locke (1689b), who tied labor to property rights, and Adam Smith (1776), who emphasized labor as the source of a nation's wealth. Unlike the static freedom of antiquity, which was tied to predefined roles, modern labor allows individuals and society to continually reinvent themselves. This dynamic view of labor aligns with the Enlightenment's vision of self-transformation through free activity. Modern society, therefore, is characterized by its capacity to evolve and redefine itself, in stark contrast to ancient views that saw social change as a threat to established order.

1.3. Revolutions and Political Orientations

This brief digression into Enlightenment ideas should not mislead us into thinking that society is merely a philosophical problem. Enlightenment ideals inspired the revolutions that shaped the modern world (Howard 2002; Israel 2001, 2011, 2014). Yet, the fact that today the problem of society predominantly appears as a philosophical matter reflects the impoverishment of contemporary political culture. For the majority, the issue of society has been reduced to participation in preexisting political institutions – such as the act of voting – while the broader societal questions are left to the concerns of a select few, namely politicians, political advisors, bureaucratic and economic elites. This narrowing of political culture has impoverished the representation of political orientations, reducing them to the completion of pre-given tasks and masking their true nature as subjective attempts to pose and address the broader problem of modern society.

In *On Revolution* (1963), Hannah Arendt observed the diminishing significance of the political realm. She argued that the revolutionary spirit, which once energized political culture and enabled citizens to engage in collective self-determination, has been lost or severely weakened. For Arendt, revolutions are a distinctly modern phenomenon and potentially a more human alternative to war, which has been as old as humanity itself. Through her examination of the American and French revolutions as paradigmatic examples, she offers an optimistic view of revolutions, acknowledging both their potential successes and inherent dangers. Arendt suggested that as modern society developed, revolutions could potentially replace war as the primary means of asserting political freedom. In other words, while revolutions are necessary for the exercise of political freedom, wars are not.

In Arendt's view, political orientations relate fundamentally to the problem of modern freedom, with the revolutionary spirit serving as the paradigmatic example of their full potential. However, the prevailing political culture largely overlooks the significance of the American and French Revolutions, reducing them to mere historical events rather than recognizing them as the transformative models for political change that they were (Davidson 2012; Howard 2002). In the 19th and early 20th centuries, these revolutions were seen as part of an ongoing historical task – to fulfill the unrealized potential of the French and American Revolutions. This vision manifested in numerous subsequent revolutions: the July Revolution of 1830 in France, the world revolution of 1848, the concept of a 'second American revolution' referring to the Civil War, Reconstruction, the Civil Rights Movement, and the New Deal; the Marxist view that the bourgeois revolution must be completed through a socialist revolution; and finally, the decolonization movements.

1.4. From Enlightenment to Industrial Society: The Shift in Understanding Human Subjectivity

The impoverishment of contemporary political culture and the narrowing of political orientations is not merely a matter of high-level politics. It reflects a deeper cultural shift in how we understand the reasons behind human behavior, a shift largely driven by the historical institutionalization of psychological and psychotherapeutic practices. This shift reframed human behavior through the lens of 'motivation'. Understanding the significance of this change is crucial for grasping the relationship between 'motivation' and political orientations. By exploring this connection, we can arrive at a more comprehensive understanding of 'motivation' itself. I hope that by linking political orientations – an area therapists may not typically focus on – to motivation, a more familiar topic, therapists can develop new approaches to addressing political orientations within therapy. To fully appreciate this shift, it is useful to contrast the contemporary view of human subjectivity with the Enlightenment conception, from which it significantly diverges.

The optimistic outlook of Enlightenment thought did not frame human subjectivity through theories of motivation. Instead, what drove human behavior was seen in its potential for *encompassing reasoning* – a synthesis of thinking and emotions – aimed at conceiving individual freedom in relation to societal freedom. Enlightenment thinkers believed that such reasoning could be achieved in various ways: for example, Kant saw the *public use of reason* as a means to transcend private interests, while Hegel and Rousseau emphasized the integration of individual interests within a collective or rational framework. For them, true freedom was realized through participation in a social order that reflected the common good. In other words, human behavior was understood historically as a dialectic between society as both a subjective and objective force. This dialectic embodied the utopian vision of the development of free bourgeois individuals, capable of independent reasoning, critical of authority, and driven by a desire for

collective freedom and cooperation. The later Enlightenment thinkers' views were preceded by an earlier shift from a feudal to a bourgeois understanding of subjectivity.

In the feudal era, the laws of reason were seen as a reflection of "the order of values that governed the human world. This order was fixed and objective, though individuals could be deficient in their understanding of it. By the High Middle Ages individuals were thought to be endowed with a rational will that enabled them to participate voluntarily in the higher order of the cosmos by controlling their passions" (Danziger 1997:43). By the High Middle Ages, individuals were thought to possess a rational will, enabling them to voluntarily participate in the higher order of the cosmos by controlling their passions. However, this conception of human subjectivity changed drastically with the rise of bourgeois society – the society of free commodity producers – emerging in the cities. Moral philosophers of the late 17th and 18th centuries recognized that the subjectivity underpinning commercial activities was culturally interpreted as driven by passion, often perceived as vices⁶ (Hume 1751; Locke 1689a; Mandeville 1714; Smith 1759). Success in this emerging bourgeois society demanded a revaluation of the feudal understanding of passions and reason, resulting in the transformation of passions into self-interest (Danziger 1997:36–50; Hirschman 1977). This shift was epitomized in Locke's philosophy of natural rights, grounded in the right of self-ownership. Locke famously argued, "every man has a *property* in his own *person*: This no body has any right to but himself. The *labour* of his body, and the *work* of his hands, we may say, are properly his" (Locke 1689b: §§ 27). Locke's philosophy reflected the historically new relationship between the individual and their world: the bond with the divine order was severed, and individuals were free to use their labor to produce and benefit from their work according to their self-interest. The individual became synonymous with self-consciousness, forming the conception of subjectivity on which Enlightenment radicals would build their utopia of the autonomous bourgeois individual.

Another shift demanded a re-evaluation of Enlightenment conceptions. The Industrial Revolution profoundly transformed society, and by the 1840s, large-scale economic crises emerged for the first time. The revolutions of 1848, driven by Enlightenment ideals, failed to deliver on the promises of earlier revolutions. The resulting political and economic crises, along with the failure of Enlightenment reasoning to address this new historical context, led to massive social fallout. Poverty, disease, and new social and political conflicts cast a long shadow over the emancipatory optimism of the Enlightenment, a shadow that lingers to this day. The dynamic interplay of society as a subjective and objective force seemed to shift into an alienated, objective totality, undermining subjective

⁶ E.J. Hundert (1994) notes in *The Enlightenment's Fable: Bernard Mandeville and the Discovery of Society* that for Bernard Mandeville, society functions as an assembly of self-interested individuals who are connected, not by shared civic responsibilities or moral integrity, but by fragile bonds rooted in envy, competition, and exploitation. Mandeville argued that individuals were often hypocritical, advocating strict moral principles while failing to practice them privately. He further observed that those denouncing vice often profited from the societal wealth generated by these very vices, such as luxury, gambling, and crime, which supported industries like law and the justice system.

capacities and rendering the Enlightenment utopia of the autonomous individual increasingly obsolete (Horkheimer 1947b; Stapelfeldt 2014). This alienation found resonance in the works of Kierkegaard, Nietzsche, and later Freud, who reflected on the contradictory condition of modern existence (Horkheimer and Adorno 1944). Though these thinkers did not abandon Enlightenment reasoning, their deep skepticism of its original optimism regarding individual reasoning as a driver of progress led them to seek its renewal. They proposed that emancipation was still possible but only as a profoundly individual process. While they accepted the potential for personal liberation, they rejected the collective forms of emancipation prevalent in their time – embodied by the labor movement and the socialist struggle – viewing them as inadequate for addressing the deeper, more personal dimensions of freedom.

The upheavals of the mid-19th century and the transformation of bourgeois society – from one of free commodity producers to an industrial mass society with an emerging proletariat – sparked diverse responses to the fundamentally altered social landscape. One prominent set of responses framed the problems of industrialized society as the ‘social question’, advocating for the expansion of state power to mediate between the needs of capital and labor. This marked a departure from earlier Enlightenment ideas, where the state's role was limited to protecting civil liberties and rights without interference in civil society. John Stuart Mill's (1848) *Principles of Political Economy*, which he revised continuously until his death in 1873, exemplified an attempt to reconcile Enlightenment principles with the challenges of an industrial society. Another key response was the rise of the social sciences, which sought to further extend state powers to manage the complexities of industrialized society (Wagner 2001, 2003).

From the mid-19th century onward, modern institutions such as the police, educational systems, and the welfare state began to take shape (Rueschemeyer and Skocpol 2017). These institutions' growing demand for skilled workers played a crucial role in the professionalization of the social sciences (Furner 2011; Wagner, Wittrock, and Whitley 1991). By the early 20th century, the progressivist movement had embraced the vision of scientifically managing industrialized society, which became the dominant articulation of the social question. Critiquing both classical liberalism and revolutionary socialism, the progressivists drew inspiration from thinkers like John Stuart Mill and from the emerging possibilities offered by the social sciences (Kloppenber 1986). This political vision gained momentum during the presidencies of Theodore Roosevelt and Woodrow Wilson and reached its culmination in Franklin D. Roosevelt's New Deal (Nugent 2010). The resulting profound restructuring of industrialized society, while evolving, endures to this day. Despite their deep ideological differences, the shift towards the scientific management of society through instrumental reasoning became a common thread linking fascism, Soviet-aligned states, and liberal Western democracies shaped by reformist social democracy, as well as the dominant model for peripheral states (Cutrone 2015b). In this broader context of social and institutional transformation, subjectivity increasingly emerged as a central concern, addressed by psychologists and psychotherapists.

1.5. Harnessing Human Subjectivity: The Contradictions of Motivation in Industrialized Society

These responses to the new problem of industrialized society led to a revaluation of subjectivity. In contrast to the earlier revolutionary transformation of passions into interests, efforts to address the problem of industrial society through state management resulted in a contradictory revaluation of subjectivity (further discussion on politics will follow). The expansion of the state into civil society, mediating the needs of capital and labor, necessitated both the development and control of subjectivity (Marvakis 2019). As Marvakis (2019, 31f.) notes, if this contradiction were to be formulated as a question, it “could be: How can individual productivity and creativity be developed *and* exploited (or even developed *to be* exploited)? Or, as a slogan: No *value appreciation* (*Wertschöpfung*) of the productive force ‘individuality,’ without its simultaneous *appreciative evaluation* (*Wertschätzung*)”.

Managing the discontents of industrial society – from both capital and labor – brought forth a range of technologies, such as psychology, designed to shape subjectivity into the productive force of individuality – whether as labor power, through the creation of new consumer needs and desires, or beyond. This constellation also gave rise to new authoritarian tendencies. These were not only expressed as a desire to protect privileges and control others to improve one’s own living standards, but also as a desire for the abdication of personal political responsibility in favor of formal procedures and professional politicians (Adorno and Horkheimer 1952; Cutrone 2013b; Horkheimer 1942).

The contradictory societal need to both develop and control subjectivity is most apparent in the problem of motivation. As a concept and field within psychology, ‘motivation’ gained prominence a century ago, emerging from the growing influence of psychoanalysis and gradually replacing it in certain domains. By the early 20th century, the phrase ‘to motivate’ became popular, particularly within the “rapidly expanding discourse of ‘social control’”. The specific reference of this term was at that time directed at the growing literature on the improvement of advertising and salesmanship, industrial efficiency, teaching practice, and personal advancement” (Danziger 1997:113). Psychologists and psychoanalysts, including Freud’s nephew Edward Bernays, became key players in this industry. They adopted its language and provided services that ranged from increasing labor’s industrial efficiency (Osterkamp 1975), public relations (Ewen 1996), and “investigations showing that the most effective kind of advertising was aimed at the creation of new ‘wants’” (Danziger 1997:113). The development of advertising was closely intertwined with the rise of crowd and mass psychology (Le Bon 1896; Trotter 1916), and new technologies of governance, including public relations and political propaganda (Bernays 1923, 1928; Lippmann 1922). As Bernays (1928) himself described in his book *Propaganda*, this new form of social control was based on the conscious manipulation of public opinion:

The conscious and intelligent manipulation of the organized habits and opinions of the masses is an important element in democratic society. Those who manipulate this unseen mechanism of society constitute an invisible government which is the true ruling power of our country. We are governed, our minds are molded, our tastes formed, our ideas suggested, largely by men we have never heard of. This is a logical result of the way in which our democratic society is organized. Vast numbers of human beings must cooperate in this manner if they are to live together as a smoothly functioning society. Our invisible governors are, in many cases, unaware of the identity of their fellow members in the inner cabinet. They govern us by their qualities of natural leadership, their ability to supply needed ideas and by their key position in the social structure. Whatever attitude one chooses to take toward this condition, it remains a fact that in almost every act of our daily lives, whether in the sphere of politics or business, in our social conduct or our ethical thinking, we are dominated by the relatively small number of persons — a trifling fraction of our hundred and twenty million — who understand the mental processes and social patterns of the masses. It is they who pull the wires which control the public mind, who harness old social forces and contrive new ways to bind and guide the world (Bernays 1928:9).

The establishment of psychology as a reliable tool of social control necessitated theoretical innovations to harness human subjectivity as an object of governance. The newly emerging psychology of motivation drew upon two key resources. First, 19th-century ideas about the relationship between consciousness and bodily movement led to the reduction of intentional consciousness to habitual behaviors, which could be influenced and modified through external training (Danziger 1997:115). This gradually transformed the concept of conscious intentionality into something controllable, with motives eventually replacing the concept of will in shaping behavior. Second, the metaphor of 'energy,' already prevalent in scientific discourse, became a powerful bridge "between the subjective experience of striving and 'motivation' as an object of control" (ibid.). Mental energy, whether conceived as drive, will, or instinct, could be "engineered like physical energy", and this idea became central to the emerging psychological framework of motivation (ibid., 116).

The psychology of motivation, closely linked to the emergence of 'personality'⁷ and 'attitudes' as psychological objects, extended the earlier

⁷"Historically, the big question about the category of 'personality' is how it ended up as a *psychological* category. It certainly did not start out that way. Prior to the nineteenth century it had been used primarily in theological, legal and ethical contexts. The theological context is the oldest, going back to mediaeval debates about the attributes of God and other spiritual beings.⁶ Here, 'personality' tends to be used mostly in the sense of a quality of personhood. Transfer to a legal context followed during the Renaissance. This was important for subsequent developments in that the category was now definitely humanized. In due course, natural right theorists were able to speak of a 'right to personality', and by the late eighteenth century the category had become established in the discourse of Continental European moral philosophy. Kant introduced a clear distinction between 'person' and 'personality', reserving the latter for the autonomous ethical subject. In the course of the nineteenth century, however, the tendency was to apply the term to the concrete individual, though often still in an ethical, not a psychological, context. 'Personality' was beginning to come down to earth. [...]"

It is unlikely that this would have been a matter of great consequence had it not been for another development that had occurred in France in the late nineteenth century. This was the *medicalization* of the category of 'personality'. The philosophical doctrines with which the term had become enmeshed were much despised by certain French doctors strongly committed to a naturalistic approach to human

interpretation of human behavior as driven by hypothetical intra-individual forces such as bodily needs and will (Danziger 1997:110–57). These assumptions about internal forces shaping behavior echoed and built upon the crisis of bourgeois subjectivity in industrialized society. The Enlightenment's encompassing reasoning, which represented human striving for freedom through individual and collective self-transformation, had been fragmented, reflecting the historical experience of society as an alienated, objective totality. Rooted in these developments, the term motivation “now signified abstract and generalizing claims about what *causes* any and all kinds of ‘behavior’”. This claimed knowledge was sometimes presented as relevant to specific fields of practice (education, industry, etc.), or even as a general ethos of a social and human engineering” (Nissen 2023:36).

The utopian promise of this new psychology was to unlock the mysteries of human behavior, offering explanations “not just for the ‘how’ but for the ‘why’ of all human activity” (Danziger 1997:110). This approach presented the prospect of a technology for turning human subjectivity into an object of governance. By disguising its normative standards, it elevated “one set of historically contingent conventions to the status of universal human needs not only emphasized their importance for the society in which they originated but provided a rationale for proselytizing efforts elsewhere” (Danziger 1997:123). The feasibility of such a technology was rooted in the “more general, and historically more deeply rooted, belief that the reasons for human conduct were to be looked for [...] in hypothetical forces that inhabited individuals” (ibid.).

In developing an emancipatory theory of motivation, Ute Osterkamp (1975) identified a fundamental contradiction in the problem of ‘motivation’ that the emerging psychological technologies sought to address. This contradiction was later echoed by Kurt Danziger (1997), though without reference to Osterkamp’s work: “‘Motivation’ is whether, how much and why people want to do what they are required to do; it is subjectivity appropriated as the object of governance, primarily in industry and education; but – as an object of a putatively neutral psychological science – it is conceptualized as if this framing power relation were irrelevant” (Nissen 2019:473). Psychological technologies aimed at regulating motivation have since become central to counseling and psychotherapy, with their purpose often being the cultivation of meta-motivation – the motivation to change one’s motivation. Examples of this include helping clients find new ways to express their ‘needs’ or to embrace motives for living more fully, as opposed to perpetuating ‘symptoms’ or ‘problematic’ behavior. Techniques like motivational interviewing, goal setting, or interpreting symptoms

problems. For them, an individual's personality was no spiritual principle but a natural, embodied entity as much prone to disease as other such entities. Of course, insofar as it was subject to disease personality became an appropriate object for medical, rather than philosophical, attention. By 1885 Ribot had published the first authoritative text on ‘The Diseases of the Personality’. Cases of what had previously been known as ‘alternating consciousness’ played a key role in these developments. They now became cases of ‘alternating personality’, a reformulation adopted by William James in his widely read *Principles of Psychology* of 1890. A warrant for this transformation could be obtained from the Lockean tradition of equating the individual self with consciousness of self [...]. Another prominent figure who played a role in bringing the French medical usage of ‘personality’ to America was Morton Prince (1905) whose early studies of multiple personality were disseminated very widely” (Danziger 1997:124).

through psychotherapeutic theories don't simply describe needs—they reinterpret human subjectivity through implicit standards. In doing so, they frame and produce needs in the first place, in accordance with the standards embedded in psychological technologies.

The standardization of human needs was not confined to psychological technologies and practices; it also reshaped our cultural understanding of society as subjective force. Concepts such as interests, motives, morals, values, passions, needs, desires, drives, preferences, reasons, intentions, and will became associated with an inner world of 'psychological' forces or individual attributes, governed by their own laws and disconnected from society as a subjective problem of orientation. This narrowing of our collective understanding of human subjectivity parallels the loss of the revolutionary spirit in political culture. The limited framing of motivation is insufficient to capture the desire for freedom expressed by Enlightenment radicals, the 'motivation' of subsequent emancipatory movements, or the impulses behind their reactionary counterparts.

We are witnessing a historical regression from the expansive understanding of political orientations *and* motivation embodied in Enlightenment reasoning, where individual freedom was only conceivable in relation to societal freedom, to a narrower view that increasingly locates problems within the subjectivity of individuals or groups. Ashley Frawley (2024) argues that the persistent political failure to bridge the gap between 'what is' and 'what ought to be' in society has led to the naturalization of unresolved societal issues as aspects of human subjectivity. This failure has reinforced a narrative in which human subjectivity is viewed as increasingly inadequate to address and overcome entrenched societal problems.

However, it is crucial not to stop at merely describing the impoverishment of our cultural understanding of subjectivity, as doing so would totalize this development and eclipse the latent emancipatory possibilities or tendencies. After all, the precondition for theory to hold emancipatory value is to move beyond the immediacy of the present. While limiting standards of psychological technologies represent the prevailing historical tendency, they cannot fully dominate human strivings and understandings, because the problem of motivation is rooted in a real contradiction—subjectivity must be developed and controlled. The “societalized/cultivated [vergesellschaftete] production of individuality, subjectivity and selfhood continues to evolve in ever new contradictory forms that matter in complex and unstable ways depending on local conditions and force relations” (Nissen 2019:479).

1.6. Productive Needs and the Desire for Agency

Critical psychologists like Ute Osterkamp (1975, 1976), Morten Nissen (2019, 2023), and Athanasios Marvakis (2019, 2022, in press) have suggested the hypothesis that these contradictory historical developments “may include latencies” for an emancipatory “societalization / cultivation [Vergesellschaftung]” (Nissen 2019:478). Nissen argues that such a project must “look in the rear-view

mirror to identify, in the terms of Ernst Bloch (1995), tendencies as latencies it might actualize, rather than imagine itself to be the first or the only alternative to an oppressive or imbecile totality. To Bloch, this is the difference between concrete or abstract utopia – hopes that either articulate and develop real possibilities, or revert and thus mirror a given state of affairs by sanctifying an abstraction that signifies a mere wish for alternatives” (Nissen 2023:35).

Retracing historical tendencies should not be seen as an attempt to recover ready-made solutions for society’s problems – history has rendered these obsolete, such as the original Enlightenment vision – nor as a teleological claim to historical truth. Rather, it should be understood as a theoretical engagement with history, aiming to clarify and develop perspectives for moving beyond accumulated historical problems that are perpetuated by the present limitations of our emancipatory understanding of subjectivity. In other words, this project seeks to revalue subjectivity in its potential for self-determination, grounded in the real possibilities of history, rather than as a mere abstract utopia.

The 20th century saw a wide variety of new concepts of human needs, recognizing individuals as increasingly self-determining, , though primarily “to harness their subjectivity for purposes that were not to be questioned” (Nissen 2019:473). This contradictory tendency – driven by capital’s societal need to acknowledge human subjectivity as self-determining (Marvakis 2019) – led Osterkamp (1975, 1976), to suggest that the inherent contradiction within the problem of motivation “could be overcome by siding with the subjects and recognizing their need for participation in collective self-determination as true and expansive agency” (Nissen 2019:473). For Osterkamp, the unique nature of human needs is encapsulated in the need to engage in collective self-determination, a concept she referred to as productive needs.

Building on evolutionary anthropology and Leontiev’s cultural historical activity theory, Osterkamp (1975) linked the development of productive needs to the broader context of anthropogenesis⁸. She suggested that human social formations historically distinguished themselves from animal societies through the advanced use and collective production of tools. These tools were not only created for immediate use but were also stored, refined, and maintained, fostering a shared intentionality centered on pre-emptive collective care. This collective activity expanded human agency, enabling the creation of symbolic artefacts and leading to the development of culture. Through participation in pre-emptive collective care, humans extended their capacities beyond natural limitations, fostering new forms of agency and generating new needs. In this social formation, needs were addressed collectively, and participation in collective care itself spurred the emergence of additional needs, creating a dynamic interplay between human agency and societal development.

While Osterkamp distinguished productive needs from the conventional understanding of needs as culturally *pregiven* sets of basic and higher needs, her

⁸Osterkamp’s conception of humanity’s societal nature was further developed and systematized by Klaus Holzkamp (1983). In a recent analysis, Michael Zander (Zander in press) discusses the work of developmental psychologist and evolutionary anthropologist Michael Tomasello (Tomasello 2019), concluding that contemporary research on anthropogenesis continues to align with key insights from these earlier Critical Psychology theories.

theory does not simply classify motives in line with established theories of motivation, but offers a fundamentally different framework for understanding them. The theory of productive needs – or, in Nissen’s terms, the desire to expand agency – focuses on the production of needs by fundamentally *detaching* the desire for agency from socialization conceived as adaptation or internalization of societally produced motives or needs (Nissen 2023:130). This theoretical detachment is achieved by linking the emergence of motivation to participation in practices through which motives are cultivated. In other words, the theory of the desire for agency conceptualizes the “personal integration of needs [...] as *individuated cultivation*” (Nissen 2023:126). This shift in perspective is crucial because it allows for addressing the problem of meta-motivation – the emergence of motives to change one’s motivation, such as altering one’s political orientation – without reducing subjects to objects of societal formation or reducing political motives to psychological events (see Adorno 2019). Instead, it views subjects as active participants in personal and collective self-transformation. Emerging “motives that ‘subjectivize’ objects, goals and hopes based on ‘productive needs’ for agency respond to the dynamic emergence of those objects, goals and hopes through *participation* in their emergence, in the constitution of the activities defined and redefined by them” (Nissen 2019:488).

The theory of the desire for agency holds significant implications for understanding far-right orientations, as well as political orientations in general. While I will only briefly address some of these points here, part two of this work further explore aspects of the theory. In future publications, I hope to delve deeper into topics such as authoritarianism – specifically the abdication of political responsibility – by drawing connections to Freudo-Marxism and the Critical Theory of Adorno and Horkheimer. Before proceeding, however, it is necessary to examine how the theory intertwines the concepts of motivation and practice in the framework of the desire for agency. In doing so, we will explore the relationship between individual agency and collective societal transformation, along with the desires driving participation in it.

The comprehensive form of motivation, understood as “as the anticipation of increased agency through participation” expresses the utopian possibility of the self-transformation of collective pre-emptive care to expand human agency as individual and collective freedom (Nissen 2023:128). Such an emancipatory transformation requires the anticipation of real, yet not fully actualized historical possibilities – as opposed to an abstract wish for alternatives. This anticipation of real historical possibilities necessitates some form of symbolic representation. While this does not need to be a theoretical articulation of the Enlightenment radicals’ societal critique, it must be *affectively* rooted in what Kant referred to as ‘public reasoning’, or more broadly, in a cultural context that fosters the “production of hope”. This hope is driven by “ideologically defined projects” and “emergent communities of hope” that embody real, though unrealized, historical tendencies (Nissen 2019:493). However, this comprehensive form of motivation is rare, and even when it does emerge, it is never in a ‘pure’ form. The desire for agency in industrialized society is inherently contradictory and must manifest in contradictory ways. Moreover, every attempt to expand agency must contain

adaptive elements; without adaptation, such attempts would be mere fantasies, ungrounded in the current reality. The dialectical relationship between adaptation and transformation of reality is always intertwined (Marvakis 2019).

However, even in its ‘impure’ and contradictory form, the comprehensive desire for agency is rarely decisive. In its more common, prevailing form, the defensive aspect takes precedence “where we participate the way we do to *avoid a reduction* of our relative agency (or of the relative fulfilment of other needs), that is, because of *coercion*” (Nissen 2023:128). Despite this, the defensive form remains tied to its comprehensive counterpart, which continues to push for change, “spurred by ever renewed reminders that self-restriction may temporarily provide safety, but undermine it on the longer run, *because it implies renouncing* (participating in) *the control of its own extension*” (ibid.). By reinterpreting Freud, Osterkamp addresses the dynamic tension between the comprehensive and defensive desires for agency, using concepts such as denial and repression. As Nissen (ibid.) explains, the “desire for expanding agency is inescapable, yet provokes anxiety and must be actively counteracted”. In psychoanalytic terms, this counteraction corresponds to what Freud identified as repression. However, in Osterkamp's theory, what Freud considered ‘primitive’ drives are instead understood as desires that push for expanded agency but simultaneously threaten security by undermining submission to existing cultural norms and structures of power.

As previously discussed in relation to the comprehensive form of motivation, the anticipatory aspect of the desire for agency must be anchored in collective projects. This principle also applies to the restrictive or defensive aspects of the desire for agency, which are similarly anchored in ideologically defined projects that drive the cultural production of hope. However, the key question is not simply whether the desire for agency is anchored, but how it is anchored and in what types of projects.

1.7. The Desire for Agency and Political Orientations

As we have already explored, the desire for agency is rooted in the collective production of symbolic representations tied to the practice of pre-emptive care. These representations of ‘society as a whole’ are necessary for individual subjects to align themselves with and anticipate societal relations in order to expand or preserve their agency. I have described how these symbolic representations are key components of the subjective knowledge expressed in political orientations. It is essential to remember that these representations are not the same as the social theories produced by the social sciences. The cultural production of hope is much broader, and for such hopes to be meaningful, they must contain an affective dimension that anchors the anticipatory aspect of the desire for agency. This affective dimension is often obscured in social science theories because they do not account for the underlying desires for agency of social scientists themselves. For example, people may be drawn to the social sciences by the hope for a stable livelihood that allows them to pursue

intellectual interests and develop their subjective capacities, or by the promise of a self-determined intellectual life.

The affective anticipation of both expanded and defensive aspects of agency is always anchored in the cultural production of hope. For ideological projects “to be motivating, be they ever soconvincing on the collective level, they must also offer – at least potentially – meaningful participation for the person motivated” (Nissen 2019:493). However, the ideological projects that produce these hopes do not necessarily embody a concrete utopia grounded in real, yet unactualized, historical possibilities. In the case of the restrictive or defensive quality, the affective anticipation is often rooted in hopes of preserving agency or preventing its reduction. This analytic distinction should not be mistaken for the reality of ideological projects, which, as always, remain inherently contradictory in nature.

While political parties and tendencies play a significant role in the cultural production of hope, ideological projects extend far beyond these examples. They encompass a wide range of aspirations, such as visions for societal transformation and knowledge articulated by the social sciences, dreams of self-transformation and insight in psychology and psychotherapy, finding meaning in family, love, and friendships, or pursuing intellectual satisfaction and critical perspectives in philosophy. Additionally, projects of hope are seen in the appreciation of beauty and aesthetics in art, seeking comfort and guidance in religion, enjoying consumer culture, striving for a better life through employment or entrepreneurship, and seeking social security through welfare services. Some ideological projects are “historically variable”, while others are “more overarching and stable”, particularly when connected “to professions, nation-states, social movements, or (e.g. religious, pedagogical etc.) institutions of everyday life, and insofar as they deal with pervasive material constraints that appear in different ways through economy, health, military, climate, etc.” (Nissen 2019:493).

Ideological projects often conflict with one another over the meanings they provide for individuals to engage in them. These conflicts can arise both within and between projects. In the latter case, the conflict centers on the practices themselves, as ideological projects compete for the ‘ownership of social problems’ (Gusfield 1989). For example, the social sciences and socialism have historically contested the solution to the ‘social question’ (Wagner 2001). In the former case, conflict involves the standards of participation that define those projects. For instance, psychotherapy establishes detailed standards regarding what constitutes psychotherapy, including what topics can and should be addressed and the prohibition against physical contact with patients (except in specific forms like body psychotherapy). In contrast, manual therapy is defined by standards focusing on the physical manipulation of muscles and joints, with less emphasis on the conversational aspects of therapist-patient interaction.

The history of psychology provides a compelling example of conflicts both between and within ideological projects, revealing the complex relationships among them. Psychologists were not always “recognized indisputably as experts in institutional fields” that we now associate with psychology (Nissen 2023:75).

Addressing the problem of the far-right or fascism was, in the first half of the 20th century, primarily a matter of (mass) politics. Political culture was focused on collective movements rather than the personal political orientations of individuals. The rise of psychology and its growing recognition of *individual* subjectivity laid the groundwork for far-right orientations to emerge as issues within the realm of psychological expertise: as problems of *individual* or *personal* political orientations.

In claiming ownership of social problems, psychologists have historically been (and still are) in competition with other “professions such as teachers, social workers, organizational consultants, and psychiatrists”, all of whom drew “on academic psychologies independently of the profession and training of psychologists” (Nissen 2023:75). Additionally, within certain fields of practice, conflicts arose within these ideological projects themselves. In counselling and psychotherapy, “alternative networks and infrastructures provided competing ‘disciplines’, both in terms of academic societies and professional training” (ibid.). For example, psychoanalytic societies dominated the mid-20th century but later networks focused on approaches like “motivational interviewing, mindfulness, systemic or narrative therapy, etc., [which] would offer standards and communities that mattered more to professionals” than their initial academic training (ibid.).

The nature of conflictual relationships between and within ideological projects varies significantly. In some cases, it may be more appropriate to describe these relationships as tensions rather than outright conflicts. For instance, starting a new family involves navigating the tension between the cultural values of the families of origin and the aspirations of the new family unit. Additionally, the couple must balance the dynamics of their life as a couple with their evolving roles within the family. In contrast, the political opposition between the Left and Right is more accurately characterized as a historical antagonism, reflecting deeper ideological and structural conflicts (Bobbio 1996; Kołakowski 1969).

1.8. Therapy with Far-Right Clients: The Challenge of Political Orientations

The conflictual relationship between and within ideological projects is especially relevant when encountering far-right clients in therapy. On one hand, there is often a conflict within the therapeutic process itself, as the humanistic values of the therapist clash with the far-right views of the client. On the other hand, a broader conflict exists between the collective projects of psychotherapy and far-right politics. Both offer drastically different worldviews and approaches to navigating societal reality, and their competing offers for rendering life meaningful are in direct conflict. Recognizing this clash between ideological projects helps explain why far-right clients might reject the established standards for what constitutes meaningful participation in therapy. For example, far-right clients might insist on discussing political issues in group therapy, making sexist or racist remarks, promoting conspiracy theories, or expressing grievances about

perceived political, moral, or cultural decline. It is crucial to understand these behaviors in the context of a broader rejection of other ideological projects and societal institutions (Harder and Opratko 2022; Opratko et al. 2021). Without this context, therapists are likely to reify the conflict between ideological projects, misinterpreting it as a personal or psychological failure on the part of the client to engage meaningfully in the therapeutic process.

Rather than reifying the conflict or using therapeutic techniques to manipulate far-right clients into complying with the established standards for participation in therapy, we should instead inquire why these clients find the far-right's ideological project more compelling for their desire for agency than participation in psychotherapy. After all, this is what they communicate to us. However, in posing such questions – both to ourselves and to the clients – we cannot assume that therapy necessarily offers a better solution from the client's perspective. Instead, we should strive for an open inquiry, focusing on self-reflection – both of the client and ourselves – regarding the motives behind supporting specific ideological projects. If this approach seems paradoxical, it is likely due to cultural representations of far-right radicals as lacking intellectual capacity, often linked to the concept of an 'authoritarian personality.' Yet the relevant question is not whether clients 'are' or 'are not' authoritarian, but whether the therapeutic encounter fosters authoritarian needs. This occurs when the cultivation of the desire for agency is constrained to a limited set of needs defined by the standards of psychological theories and practices.

Despite cultural representations of far-right radicals, being "motivated for something" implies always "reflecting and enjoying that 'something' as worth pursuing. This reflexivity is an ongoing collective process of at once framing and affective tuning; it is immanent to any activity, and not reserved for or limited to individuals' thoughts or feelings" (Nissen 2019:487). An inquiry focused on self-reflexivity must avoid conflating far-right clients with far-right movements or our symbolic interpretations of them, as well as our assumptions about the societal conditions that may benefit such movements. The same caution applies to not identify actions and motives. For instance, attributing actions associated with the far right, such as acts of racism, to a singular and same kind of (racist) motive⁹. What an action represents culturally must not be conflated with the *subjective* motives inspiring these actions.

⁹ Adorno remarked critically regarding antisemitism, quoting Shlomo Bergman's *Methodological Errors in the Study of Anti-Semitism* "that 'there is no reason for assuming that a man who physically assaults Jews is more anti-semitic than one who declaims against them at street-corners: he is merely more violent. Similarly, the disaster which results from an anti-Jewish act in no way reflects the degree of anti-semitism which inspires it. The firing of a synagogue, for instance, may be far more tragic than the circulation of a pamphlet, but this does not prove that its instigator is more anti-semitic. He may equally well be inspired by mere mob hysteria or opportunist ambition. Yet in the majority of modern treatments of the subject, degrees of violence and disaster are blithely identified with degrees of anti-semitism. We must teach ourselves to realize that every act from which Jews suffer is not necessarily and automatically anti-semitic'. These critical remarks should be strongly emphasized. Not only do we have to carefully avoid a short-circuit between theory and practice which could easily lead us to fight symptoms and neglect essentials, but the interconnection between anti-semitic manifestations and the problem of discrimination as it has arisen from the powerful example of Hitler-Germany, is highly dubious. There was no immediate relationship between spontaneous anti-semitic outbreaks and the extermination policy of the Nazis" (Adorno 2019:xlvi). Marvakis (Marvakis 1996:75–77) made a similar

Furthermore, the theory of the desire for agency advises us not to view this inquiry, which aims at differentiating between actions and motives, as a search for pre-existing reasons for clients joining or supporting the far right. Instead, we should approach it as a process of cultivating these reasons or motives. I argue that cultivating these *individual* reasons or motives advances the political autonomy of the subject, which opposes the authoritarian tendencies that fuel far-right politics. Conversely, if therapy fails to achieve this, it risks contributing to the authoritarian condition by shaping individual subjects ‘from above’ – for example, by fostering a culture that reduces individual racist slurs to mere reflections of societal trends or far-right movements, thus obscuring personal responsibility; or by encouraging clients to replace their far-right orientations with preestablished cultural norms.

When asking far-right clients what they find compelling about a slogan they have recently used, such as ‘refugees are taking our jobs and housing,’ they are likely to respond with another propaganda phrase like ‘our people must come first; I want to protect the nation, the folk, etc.’ Right-wing radicals may believe these slogans represent their true reasons for supporting far-right ideologies, possibly telling themselves heroic stories about their (future) contribution to the ‘rebirth of the nation’ or ‘redeeming the folk from its enemies.’ However, we should not be sidetracked by such surface-level answers but should continue the inquiry into *individual* motives. This *practice* holds the potential to *cultivate* and strengthen these motives, which otherwise risk being eclipsed by the far-right slogans and the standards they express.

Far-right clients only begin to cultivate motives that align with far-right slogans after engaging in activities that support these ideologies – such as consuming far-right internet propaganda or attending far-right events. Yet, the original hopes that drew them into these activities were likely different. These hopes were not initially rooted in the standards of far-right ideological projects but stemmed from their everyday life, reflecting *personal* reasons for why supporting the far-right seemed to offer *them* a way to expand or preserve their agency. These initial motives were likely more profane and self-serving than the heroic narratives they now adopt, since, at least to some extent, their decision to support the far-right would have been opportunistic (Osterkamp 1982) – even if only in terms of seizing the far-right’s promise of salvation from the alienated experience of modern life. However, these opportunistic hopes ceased to be cultivated as motives once the client adopted far-right orientations because they conflicted with the ideological standards of far-right projects, which demand unselfish or even heroic participation. Consequently, these standards shape the development of motives to align with such ideals.

Conversely, a similar transformation occurs when far-right clients signal to their therapists that they have either stopped supporting the far-right or intend to do so. In these cases, it is equally important not to limit the cultivation of their desire for agency to the pre-established standards of ‘democratic’ projects, such

argument, analyzing how in Nazi Germany antisemitism became so ingrained in societal processes that individual antisemitic motives became more and more insignificant. This led to a demoralization of subjective responsibility. I have elaborated on this theme of demoralization in part three.

as the aspiration to become a ‘good citizen.’ Instead, therapy should focus on nurturing the client’s individual motives for revising their political orientation (see last chapter). In other words, the goal should be to foster the development of critical, *individual* political orientations that are not merely aligned or striving to become identical with the standards of any given ideological project. This process requires self-reflection on which needs should be cultivated, not from a purely philosophical standpoint, but grounded in the everyday conduct of life. Such reflection must also address the societal phenomenon of opportunism. Rather than condemning opportunistic motives or the identification with ideological projects as unethical – a perspective rooted in ideological projects themselves – opportunism should be approached with a critical awareness of the unresolved socio-historical problem of emancipation. This perspective must be able to recognize the subjective necessity of opportunism within the current societal reality, while simultaneously understanding it as a false necessity (see chapter 2 and 4).

Making opportunistic motives for joining ideological projects invisible by transforming them into motives that align with the standards such projects uphold – leading to an uncritical identification with them – is not unique to the far-right. This possibility stems from the affective anticipation of participating in collective projects, regardless of their political orientation. Creative “accomplishments, insights, necessity or political strength (etc.) of a collective activity can be experienced as joyful and engaging (or disappointing, boring, terrifying, etc.) before the various individual implications are fully reflected and felt. Sometimes, this ‘seduction’ turns out problematic or even leads to self-deceit; sometimes, it is the birth, the communal proto-form, of new individual motives” (Nissen 2019:487f).

1.9. Contradictory Movements: Capitalism, Alienation, and Emancipatory Struggles

The emergence of new motives is always contradictory, coevolving with the societal “production of individuality, subjectivity and selfhood [...] in ever new contradictory forms that matter in complex and unstable ways depending on local conditions and force relations” (Nissen 2019:479). On one hand, this process leads to the dissolution of life into the standards of industrialized society, which erodes subjective capacities to articulate the problem of society, now experienced as an alienated objective totality. The “all-pervading trait of social ‘alienation’ largely reflects the nature of a commodity economy in which” humans are mere “producer and consumer of goods” but not “the subject of [...] their] society” (Adorno 2019:li). On the other hand, industrialized society is a collective praxis in constant self-transformation, continuously incited to transcend itself. This process produces new forms of life while simultaneously dismantling others, driven by the contradiction that collective societal praxis “keeps transforming and challenging the life that it [...] reassert[s] repeatedly as its core concern. But each time, this is a wager. There is no guarantee that evolving practices can be

resituated in life as meaningful, and there is no standpoint of ‘bare life’ outside praxis from which we can judge them” (Nissen 2019:497).

Understanding this contradiction is crucial, as it represents a subjective problem of orientation of the open and problematic kind. It reflects the problem of society, which cannot be approached from a detached or neutral standpoint but must be addressed within its historical context. History provides us with the perspectives and standpoints of political orientations, and the interpretation of these orientations is always normative (Marvakis 1996:65–78). Any interpretation, including the one suggested here, should be evaluated based on its ethical and political implications in raising and addressing the problem of society. The perspective outlined so far shows how psychological technologies historically emerged from “industrial and institutional standardizations of activities that people could (should, must!) be motivated for” (Nissen 2019:487). Therapy and psychology compete with other ideological projects in making life meaningful within an otherwise opaque, alienated societal reality produced and transformed by industrialized society.

Even if the *value appreciation* or *appreciative evaluation* of subjectivity (see 1.5.), embodied in psychological practices, is largely instrumentalized to serve industrial standards in developing individuality as a productive force, this does not mean that the broader historical tendency to value subjectivity in the form of individuality is wrong from an emancipatory perspective. Rather, these standards simultaneously undermine and propel the development of new forms subjectivity and subjective capacities. Political struggles for the recognition of waged labor, women, sexual minorities, racialized, and Indigenous populations have always reflected and sometimes revealed new possibilities within the contradictory developments brought about by industrialized society (D’Emilio 1983; Mitchell 1966). As Nissen (2019:483) argues, each of these struggles is, potentially, a struggle to transform society as a whole; “‘society’, as a potentially self-reflecting agent and arena of struggles for recognition (i.e. a state), becomes visible”. However, this potential is rarely fully articulated in these struggles, which are still largely driven by pre-industrial conceptions of the problem of society (Tamás 2006).

The following chapters will delve into this topic further, proposing that emancipation must be understood as an unresolved socio-historical problem. First, by examining the historical failures of emancipatory movements, and second, by analyzing the success of the far-right as a dialectical response to these failures, particularly in articulating compelling answers to the problem of an alienated objective totality. This section continues to explore implications for therapeutic practice.

I propose that understanding emancipatory struggles – and their far-right, anti-emancipatory counterparts – extends beyond high-level politics and is also a crucial matter for psychotherapy, both within and outside psychological practices. At stake is the fundamental question of whether therapeutic practices contribute to population control or aid in clarifying the problem of society and its political resolution by fostering the development of critical consciousness. Both outcomes are possible, and they are dialectically intertwined within the

contradictions of modern society. As Adorno argued in his 1950 *Remarks on the Authoritarian Personality*, the contradictions inherent in modern industrial society contain an emancipatory potential, which stands as the *intrinsic* antithesis to fascism:

Modern society is a mass society. This does not merely refer to the tremendous quantitative increase of the world population during the industrial era. There are also qualitative connotations. The whole pattern of present-day culture is moulded in such a way that it takes care of the masses by ‘integrating’ them into standardized forms of life which are built after the model of industrial mass production, and by actually or vicariously satisfying their wants and needs. Today’s huge increase of social control over the masses equals the pressure potentially exercised by the masses over the social structure. [...] They are manipulated as objects of all kinds of social organizations, including their own, because their being mere objects has become problematic since they reached—through technical civilization—a stage of enlightenment which would enable them to become true subjects if the control mechanisms would be superseded at any point. Even repression in its most ruthless form had to reckon with the oppressed masses. [...] Nazi economics and politics did not simply represent the interests of the ruling group; they maintained traits of compromise. The masses are incessantly moulded from above, they must be moulded, if they are to be kept at bay. The overwhelming machinery of propaganda and cultural industry evidences the necessity of this apparatus for the perpetuation of a set-up the potentialities of which have outgrown the status quo. Since this potential is also the potential of effective resistance against the fascist trend, it is imperative to study the mentality of those [including us] who are at the receiver’s end of today’s social dynamics. We must study them [and also ourselves] not only because they [and we] reflect these dynamics, but above all because they [and we] are the latter’s intrinsic anti-thesis (Adorno 2019:lxv–lxvi).

The potential resistance against being moulded ‘from above’ echoes Marx’s (1852) dialectical understanding of modern mass politics, first developed in his analysis of the 1848 Revolutions in France and their political aftermath (see chapters 4 and 6). Advancing this potential refers to the cultivation of political autonomy, expressed through the development of orientations among both the masses and individuals desiring political self-representation. While this task can only be fully realized through mass politics (see chapters 2 and 4), therapy – after all an institution of civil society – can still contribute meaningfully to this goal. For therapy and psychology to foster this potential for political self-representation, they must adopt a “perspective of social movements ‘from below’”, that begins “with the *autonomy* of subjectivity and aims at transcending subjects’ mere *functionality*”, as dictated by the preexisting standards of ideological projects ‘from above’ (Marvakis 2019:35). However, modern social movements ‘from below’ are neither inherently resistant to being ‘moulded from above’ nor inertly emancipatory, as the history of fascism has shown. Historic fascism, after all, was both a mass movement from below and a political project

imposed from above, distinguishable by the destructive dynamic it unleashed¹⁰ (Renton 2020). Following Marx's insights, modern social movements 'from below' – whether aimed at emancipation or not – are inherently intertwined with societal transformations 'from above,' which is what ultimately defines them as modern. As Marx emphasized, the character of modern emancipatory struggles, particularly in industrialized societies, is fundamentally different from those of earlier eras.

As the philosopher Gáspár Miklós Tamás notes, in "most of history, humanity was not thought to have been co-extensive with humankind. Women, slaves, foreigners, children were almost invariably excluded everywhere [...]. These and many others were not supposed to share with the rest the prerogatives of full-fledged human beings" (Tamás 2006:242). In precapitalist societies, the struggles of the oppressed were defined by an external relationship to their oppressors, with clear and rigid lines of opposition. The oppressed were not considered responsible for their oppression; they were born into a hereditary system of privileges and power that structured domination. The purpose of society was not to meet the desires or needs of all people but rather to serve only the interests of those deemed full-fledged humans, often with divine or inherited 'divine' authority.

In contrast, the modern industrialized society of capital embodies both oppression and liberation, driving "economic and intellectual growth, imagination, waste, [...] destruction, destitution" (Tamás 2006:230). Its development allows us, at least potentially, a critical view of history¹¹ – one in which the purpose of society is indeed pre-emptive care, though this purpose has been obscured both in the past and continues to be disguised today (Adorno 2003). Capitalism "helps us to know because it is unable to sustain illusions, especially naturalistic and religious illusions. It liberates subjects from their traditional rootedness (which was presented to them by the *ancien régime* as 'natural') only to hurl them onto the labour market where their productive-creative essence reveals itself to be disposable, replaceable, dependent on demand" (Tamás 2006:230). Class in modern society is not hereditary, and power and privilege are far more fluid than in previous systems. What "human beings are, is contingent or stochastic; there is no way in which they are *as such*, in themselves. Their [...] being] is limited by the permanent re-evaluation of the market and by the transient historicity of everything, determined by – among other contingent factors – random developments in science and technology" (ibid.).

¹⁰A key distinction between fascism and other far-right movements lies in its specific dynamic (Renton 2019, 2020, 2024). Fascist mass movements become complicit with their leaders through acts of violence and crime, creating a bond of dependence. The masses, having committed atrocities, rely on their leaders to gain more power to protect them from the consequences of their actions, particularly from what they perceive as their 'enemies.' This creates a dangerous cycle of escalating violence and destruction, exemplified most horrifically by National Socialism.

¹¹Marvakis (2019) argues that the neoliberal transformation of capitalism, through the advancement of individuality as a productive force and the creation of new historical forms of agency, has brought previously underdeveloped aspects of subjectivity to light. A dialectical reflection on this historical shift deepens our critical understanding of the contradictions inherent in motivation, offering a more nuanced theoretical comprehension of capital's implicit potential for freedom.

Moreover, in modern society, it is not only the ‘oppressed’ who are alienated from power – so too are their ‘masters,’ who lack the capacity for direct domination. Their relationship is not external but inherently contradictory. Labor “itself has become a moment of capital“ (Marx 1857:282); thus, the “working class is not situated outside capitalism. It embodies capitalism as much as the bourgeoisie does” (Tamás 2006:248). The discontents arising from modern society, along with the unfulfilled needs and desires it generates, do not offer a straightforward path to emancipation. Instead, they also fuel the subjective drive for transformation and renewal within the system. Consequently, modern emancipatory movements are not external to the conditions they seek to overturn; they emerge from within, symptomatic of the conditions of industrialized society they aim to challenge. (Cutrone 2006). Even as they strive to transcend these conditions, they often reproduce them in new forms. This contradiction led Marx to recognize the necessity of dialectics in the theoretical and practical understanding of modern emancipatory movements (Cutrone 2021b).

Conclusion: The Post-Psychological Perspective

Translating the dialectical perspective on social movements ‘from below’ and transformations from ‘above’ to therapy involves adopting what Nissen terms a post-psychological approach, recognizing that psychological and psychotherapeutic theories are not merely insufficient to grasp the motives behind far-right political orientations but, in fact, contribute to the personalizing and psychologizing of these phenomena. A post-psychological perspective must be capable of acknowledging that psychology and therapy are just two of many collective ideological projects vying for influence in shaping societal and individual self-transformation. Motivation is anchored in both collective projects and individual life, and these are deeply intertwined with (and invested in) historical developments. The importance of this historical perspective has been undervalued in certain strands of Critical Psychology, leading to “endlessly repeated issue of how exactly to relate these ‘inner’ realities” to “social practice; and within many cases, eventually, tends to reduce the whole issue of historically situated social practice, struggles and contradictions, to empty catchphrases” (Nissen 2019:495).

The theories of political orientation and the desire for agency meet the outlined criteria. However, I suggest that their primary advantage for this investigation lies in two key aspects. First, they are not tied to any specific therapeutic school, making them potentially appealing to therapists from diverse backgrounds. Second, they view “participation itself” (whether of individuals in collective subjects, ideological projects, or the broader praxis of society) “as *implying* critique” (Nissen 2019:490). The desire for agency (or ‘productive needs’), understood as the need for “participating in preemptive collective control of life conditions, spur a development, and this includes a reflection and transformation, of the subject, of the particular practice, of the collective and of culture in general, in specific constellations [...]”. ‘Productive needs’ make me ask

‘is this activity worth our efforts?’, and ‘is my participation worth my efforts (and the efforts of those who help me)?’ – but also ‘is this who I want to be?’ In all these aspects, our ways of asking and answering are developed in socio-cultural forms” (Nissen 2019:490f). Developing these questions and responses in socio-cultural contexts like therapy helps counter the industrialized society’s tendency to impose standards ‘from above’, dissolving life into standards. When situated within the subjective desire for agency, these standards can be used as means of orientation to relate willfully to our actions and our investment in collective projects.

The development of critical consciousness as an implicit potential of participation holds significant implications for clinical practices. These implications deserve extensive and thorough discussion, which is beyond the scope of this text. For now, a brief reference to a critical reading of the Vygotskian tradition will have to suffice, as I believe it offers a strong theoretical foundation for dialogue across various therapeutic approaches (González Rey, Fleer, and Veresov 2017; Goulart, Mitjáns Martínez, and Adams 2021; Nissen 2023). I propose that Vygotsky’s understanding of affects and ‘higher psychological faculties’ – emerging first in social interactions as proto-forms before becoming individuated in personal consciousness – helps us theoretically grasp the subversive potential of subjectivity, “a vanishing moment of not-yet-developed personal subjectivity that pervades socio-cultural forms and exceeds standards imposed ‘from above’ (Nissen 2023:158). Further development of this idea must avoid presenting subjectivity as a metaphysical essence of subversion. As discussed in chapter five, where I expanded on the work of Marvakis, Nissen, and Osterkamp, and linked their theories to the Marxist ideas of Georg Lukács and Ágnes Heller, I proposed addressing the issue of subversion by situating it within the historical contradictions of motivation. This approach allows us to explore how motives emerge and evolve to transcend their original boundaries.

Therapy informed by a post-psychological perspective can foster the development of subjective critique implied by participation itself, helping individuals shape political orientations that exceed pre-given standards. However, we must begin this task by examining our own orientation as therapists, counselors, psychologists, or researchers. This involves more than merely doing our jobs by following established guidelines, methodologies, and professional norms¹². We must also ask ourselves a supplementary, orientation-relevant

¹² Encountering far-right clients in therapy might be accompanied unsettling affects that are related to professional standards. For instance, therapists might experience fear of exclusion from professional communities or alienation from colleagues. Travis Heath (2022), a black psychotherapist committed to social justice, shares how the polarized political climate after Trump’s election affected his work. He felt anxious about being judged or excluded by colleagues who supported Hillary Clinton, after he framed his therapeutic relationship with a Trump supporter as a subversive act against polarization. Though risky, this approach turned out to be a pivotal moment in therapy, as it helped the client engage with subversive acts in her own life, overcoming her initial anxiety.

This case highlights the real possibility of exclusion for not aligning with prevailing norms when engaging with far-right clients, even in generally left-leaning or progressive professional spaces. However, it also reflects a broader issue: individuals’ political orientations always express their relationships with collective subjects (families, workplaces, political groups, etc.). Meanings that challenge these norms are particularly relevant for individuals who want or need to be part of such subjects, yet it is rarely clear whether politically contested or morally charged new meanings could lead to

question: What is the broader practical purpose of our work within the collective practice of society, beyond simply carrying out pre-given tasks and solving predefined problems? (Marvakis 1996:49). When encountering far-right clients or reflecting on such cases, we are additionally prompted to ask what we should be motivated for in these encounters and according to which standards.

When seeking answers to the questions we pose, we must remain aware that the nature of our questions influences the answers we find. Our inquiry into the problem of society – the unresolved socio-historical task of emancipation – cannot yield final answers, as this problem itself remains historically open and is subject to transformation through ongoing struggles. Clarifying the problem of society, as well as the task of emancipation, demands engagement with both history *and* theory, as the problem evolves with each new attempt to address it.

Moreover, we should not expect our efforts to result in final answers, particularly because we cannot confidently assert that the task of emancipation can be fully resolved within modern society. As history has shown, “only direct (coercive) social domination was ever overturned by popular revolt. As the experience of so-called ‘real socialism’ shows only too clearly, a change in legal ownership (of the means of production) from that of private citizens or their associations to that of the state or government means as little (for the workers) as the passage of a company from ownership by a family into that of a pension fund. The ‘expropriation of the expropriators’ did not end alienation” – it did not appropriate the potential for freedom implicit in alienation¹³. This historical insight, our knowledge of not knowing the plausibility of true emancipation, must not be treated as a side note. It must be taken seriously by anyone engaging in the project of advancing critical consciousness.

Political autonomy, critical consciousness, or independence in civil society should not be conflated with the concept of autonomy as it is traditionally understood in psychological and therapeutic theories. Adhering strictly to these theories, even those within critical psychology, would fall short of the post-psychological framework and risk once again subjecting life to (industrial) standards. Instead, these theories must be historicized as tools for orientation, offered by the collective projects of psychotherapy (and psychology), designed to make life meaningful, navigate societal contradictions and to expand or preserve agency through participation in the societal process of pre-emptive care. These orientations should be considered in a manner similar to those provided by other collective projects. Following the Marxist theorist Chris Cutrone (2024), I propose understanding collective projects and the hopes they articulate in relation to emancipation as part of an unresolved socio-historical task, one that

exclusion or marginalization. Expanding agency thus involves risk, since it may entail leaving or transforming our participation in collective subjects. Engaging with unsettling, undefined affects without immediately subjecting them to common sense, may lead us to unexpected and transformative places. This affective experience of the “not-yet-wanted” reflects what Ernst Bloch called the “not-yet-known,” full of utopian potential (Nissen 2019:159).

¹³This quote should not imply that merely eliminating alienation is an adequate solution to the complex problem of alienation, which is a defining characteristic of modern society. I address the nuances and broader implications of this issue in more depth in the following chapters.

recognizes how past efforts at emancipation have accumulated into the historical challenges that contemporary attempts must now address.

I hope that the proposed perspective can contribute to advancing emancipatory therapy by offering a deeper understanding of how the individual desire to expand and preserve agency is intertwined with collective attempts in posing and addressing the problem of society, as well as historically accumulated challenges. This perspective is not entirely new but builds upon existing trends in emancipatory therapy that emphasize struggles for recognition. However, by addressing the issue of far-right political orientations, the broader issue of political orientation itself is brought to the forefront as a conflict between competing ideological projects.

Chapter 2: The Problem of Modern Politics and the Marxist hypothesis

This chapter shifts away from the psychological lens to further develop the themes introduced in Chapter One, with a specific focus on the political sphere. It adopts a dialectical approach, framing the far-right as a problem that extends beyond its own immediate implications and signals the political responsibility of the Left. The chapter critically examines and challenges dominant distinctions and conceptual frameworks surrounding political orientations in contemporary political culture and social sciences. By situating the left-right distinction within the broader context of modern politics, shaped by the dual forces of emancipation and opportunism, it presents an alternative perspective. The chapter also introduces Chris Cutrone's Marxist hypothesis as a methodological foundation for understanding political orientations as historically evolving relations between theory and practice. This approach, which emphasizes the political, is contrasted with more conventional uses of Marxist theory in critical social sciences.

2.1. The Problem of Modern Politics

Modern politics – resulting from democratic revolutions, capitalist transformations, conflict and other vicissitudes of history – predominantly interact with the institutions of the nation-state. Despite this institutionalization, they are still shaped by the creative instability of modern society, where “all that is solid melts into air” (Marx and Engels 1848:465). This instability gives rise to constantly new desires, needs, liberating social relations and emancipatory visions, and can become embodied in new political orientations, but also anxieties and desires for solid foundations and stable social relations. It is also the reason why there cannot be agreement about what society is because every attempt to define or represent society implies claims about how society ought to be, what should be preserved and valued, what should be changed and what is changeable through politics, and what constitutes problems requiring political resolutions.

Its inbuilt dissonance demands modern politics to “seek constantly a stability that will always exceed their grasp” (Howard 2002:viii). Thus, it lies in the nature of modern politics that political actors must influence political culture get ‘the people’ invested into their political project by gaining support and legitimacy through votes and/or by building social movements. This striving for legitimacy, along with the inherent instability, distinguish modern politics as mass politics, concerning the whole population, from earlier forms such as aristocratic rule (Landa 2019). The aftereffects of the historical entrance of the masses onto the stage of history, and the instability that comes with it, are a precondition that politically conscious actors, including therapists, must reckon with, either as a problem or as a potential for collective emancipation.

The history of modern politics has seen multiple attempts to radically suppress its creative instability, most prominently through the Nazi variant of fascism, Stalinism, and a range of dictatorships. However, liberal democracies are also marked by such antipolitical tendencies, which exacerbate during times of war, economic and political crisis. Antipolitics are expressed in practices leading to “unmediated identification of politics with society, whether through the subordination of society or the liquidation of the party in the state, all in the name of quieting the inherent instability of politics, which society in its crisis of capitalism cannot afford” (Cutrone 2015a). In antipolitics, the state escapes social control and terminates politics, including the liquidation of political consciousness by compelling the population to identify with a specific vision of society – either defending what exists or fighting for what ought to be (Cutrone 2014b, 2015a). These suppressive tendencies are inherent to modern politics because “the quest for solid foundations in a modern society whose future must remain open is also the source of the antipolitical [...] threat” (Howard 2002:xi).

The history of radical antipolitics haunts collective memory, with contemporary political imagination fostering fears of history repeating itself, most prominently in the form of the spectre of a fascist or Nazi Fourth Reich (Rosenfeld 2019). Political actors frequently invoke these memories to draw dramatic comparisons, mobilize support, and legitimize their projects while delegitimizing others. These comparisons often hinder understanding of the nature of antipolitics and, more subtly, express antipolitics themselves. They promote “the banality of confessions and indignations” that proclaim ‘Never again’ instead of fostering a critical understanding of history “to comprehend what should ‘never again’ return” (Pelinka 2022:246).

Political culture exerts a profound, often unconscious, influence on how political orientations and societal conflicts are perceived and experienced. It is a contradictory phenomenon, shaped by competing currents and highlighted in moments of political conflict. Despite this inherent dynamism, the prevailing political culture tends to function as a conservative force, acting as an interpretive framework that anchors solutions to societal problems and visions of alternative futures within the immediacy of the present. This, in turn, shapes how both the past and future are imagined. Moreover, as this interpretive horizon ripples across the political spectrum, it restricts our understanding of political conflicts to their immediate context, influencing our interpretations of why and

how these conflicts arise. Such interpretations frequently reify modern political processes and conditions, often placing blame on particular political actors or segments of the population for societal issues. Overcoming these and other limitations, which hinder the development of a critical historical consciousness, is a challenging task. It requires clarifying the historical accumulation of interrelated political problems, that has resulted from past attempts at mediating societal conflicts and crises. The challenge lies in moving beyond mere descriptions of these problems to grasp how they point beyond themselves, revealing the potential solutions embedded within their contradictions.

2.2. Social sciences and political culture

Political culture is not an object but societally produced at the interplay of politics, the technologies of mass media and social sciences. The latter serve as powerful apparatus of population control, which is directed by the political allocation of resources and economic investments (Marvakis in press; Rueschemeyer and Skocpol 2017; Wagner 2001). The effects of these allocations often unconsciously limit the desires and needs of those inhabiting the current order, by developing (technocratic) remedies for social problems in accordance with the prevailing political culture (Marvakis 2019). Emerged in wake of the industrial revolution during the second half of the 19th century, modern social science has co-evolved with the political need to find answers for the ‘social question’ referring to conflicts, discontents and human suffering resulting from industrialization (Rueschemeyer and Skocpol 2017; Wagner 2001). In this regard, social sciences can be seen as embodying a specific set of political orientations: Individual social scientists and the associated collectives (professional associations, governmental or industry/business workplaces, advisory positions, contract work) develop from a specific perspective subjective perspective knowledge about society, suggest remedies and by doing so sustain their livelihood.

Until the beginning of the 20th century and the gradual formation of Fordism, social science did not have the sole authority in gaining knowledge about the world or the theoretical interpretation of society and political orientations. The political orientations embodied in the social sciences, served as competition and alternative to socialism in the quest of solving the problems and contradictions of capitalism. Socialism aimed to transcend capitalism, while the social science contributed to the management of capitalism. Thus, the social sciences— along with psychology, psychotherapy and social work (Marvakis in press) – have played a crucial role in the development of the modern welfare state and the emergence of “troubled person industries” (Gusfield 1989). Following Habermas (Habermas 1972), this process was underpinned by historical narrowing of the concept of knowledge itself, expressed in ‘scientism’, “science’s belief in itself: that is, the conviction that we can no longer understand science as one form of possible knowledge” (ibid., 4): The concept of knowledge was identified with scientific understanding, excluding other forms of knowledge

that are crucial for comprehending and transforming society with emancipatory intent. After all, politics is an issue of practical reasoning, strategy and tactics.

I will expand on the role of social science more thoroughly in part two of this manuscript. For now, I will briefly highlight its significance in addressing the methodological problem of how to overcome the limiting effect of political culture on our understanding of how political orientations and conflicts between them emerge in the everyday conduct of life. There are many voices in the social sciences, of course, but as I hope to illustrate, at large the social sciences serve as a conservative force. However, exposing the limiting effects of social sciences – including ‘critical’ social sciences – on human knowledge, by contrasting them with knowledge embodied in other political orientations, provides a powerful perspective to clarify the issue of emancipation. In this respect, the critical engagement with the role of social sciences can be a first step in moving beyond the cultural constraints on understanding political orientations and conflicts.

The role of the observer, as assumed by social sciences, should not be taken at face value, since social sciences are not isolated from politics. A critical view of social sciences must distinguish them from politics ‘proper,’ even though ongoing debates within the field discuss their political influence (Fay 1975, 1987). Nevertheless, social sciences have, after all, a relation to politics. It is the relationship which is crucial, referring to the old question, ascribed to Lenin, pointing to the core of politics: Who will overtake whom? The politics of social sciences are not the driving force but depended on politics of other – the political of parties and governmental administration. While these institutional, capital ‘P’ politics are depended on mass support, social sciences stand in a service relation to politics because it is depended on political resource allocation. By being constrained by and reliant on the horizon of the prevailing political culture of institutional politics, social sciences are a conservative force reinforcing the status quo as Brian Fay (1987) argued. In contrast to the enlightenment philosophy, which developed new ideas of emancipation and have given rise to new political movements (Israel 2001, 2011, 2014), modern social sciences, lacking political independence, did not inspire democratic revolutions but instead serve as apparatus for the control and ‘development’ of the population to manage societal problems within the given order (Habermas 1972; Horkheimer 1947a; Marvakis 2019; Wagner 2001).

This tendency of control and development of subjectivity according to the societal status quo is illustrated by the object of social science: objectifying the population and turning it into data to provide useful information for political intervention (Adorno 1968). Even though anthropologist Laura Nader (1972) urged her colleagues to “study up”, to this day social scientists rarely research societal elites and focus mostly on political orientations that are seen in the prevailing culture as undesirable and in need of control, such as the far-right. In this capacity, social scientists not only study, but *produce* public opinion and not merely represent opinions in the population nor ‘manufactures consent’ as *content* of public opinion. By setting the parameters of what is deemed as of interest, perhaps most notably by determining and controlling the questions of surveys that are of (political) interest, social sciences influence the content of

what appears as the public opinion which is discussed in the media. Pertaining the question of political orientations, the crucial value of social sciences as population control lies less in shaping the content of public opinion but in their capacity to produce *the object* of public opinion as a *standardized* meaning making resource in political culture (Bourdieu 1982, 2001): The standardization of political orientations as *opinions* transforms subjective political orientation into quantifiable objects, which, along with other purposes, legitimizes bureaucratic intervention and supplies political actors with useful information for framing electoral campaigns and policy measures to gain or preserve popular support. The power practice of quantification (Porter 1995) standardizes and normalizes political orientations, establishing what 'counts' as political opinion, but also discriminating against what does not count. Yet the power of interpretation is often beyond the remit of social scientists. The statistics about political violence, including the kind perpetrated by the right, are used by all kinds of political actors for their respective political ends.

However, quantification is not the only practice for limiting subjective political orientations. Also qualitative and theoretical approaches to social science have developed a wide range of practices for objectifying political orientations, which interpret political orientations of others through the lens of the political orientation of social sciences; that is, their relation to politics (Marvakis 1996:65–78). The practices of standardizing and normalizing what political orientations includes assigning who holds what orientation, how these actors they relate to each other, how they should be distinguished, and how they should be categorized in legitimate and illegitimate orientations. Even though modern social sciences are necessarily conservative in that they do not inspire new forms of political movements and politics, they provide a powerful contribution to the political management of the given societal order, by normalizing and standardizing subjective political orientations. Thus, they serve as a powerful technology for politics, shaping the public conception of what is left and what is right, which orientations should be desired and which rejected as illegitimate.

The effects of the social sciences on political culture can be exemplified by considering how we imagine a person whom we would associate with the far-right. Knowing nothing more, but that the person 'is' a right – wing radical will give us a wide array of ideas about the person, their life and what they are in support of and what against. If we were to meet the imagined person, our cultural knowledge would overshadow our perception of the subjective political orientation of the person. Political culture influences not only the content of the political orientations we imagine but more crucial how we imagine political orientations altogether. We are likely to conceive of subjective political orientations in personalized categories such as attitudes, values, identities, character traits or habits; and we are likely to sociologize political orientations by 'knowing' who the sociological groups are which exhibit these categories (see part chapter one for a theoretical clarification of subjective political orientations).

Clarifying the task of emancipation demands a different approach to political orientations to overcome the limits in social sciences. The challenge in clarifying the task is not to naturalize – personalize or sociologize – the

preconditions that make the far-right political appear as a viable and desirable solution for societal problems. This requires a shift in perspective from individual and collective political orientations being not the object of societal formation but its subject. Doing so must entail a critical examination of predominant crisis narratives, which explain the rise of the far right as a result of a political, cultural or economic crisis of some kind or as result of multiple crises (Eatwell and Goodwin 2018; Fraser 2019; Manow 2018, 2021; Mouffe 2018; Mudde 2017; Norris and Inglehart 2019). Furthermore, we must find a way to understand how past political failures to bring about collective emancipation – historically associated with the Left – have contributed as historical forces to the emergence of the contemporary prevailing political culture (Cutrone 2010c, 2014b, 2018a). Doing so is necessary to overcome the fixation on the immediacy of the present and its conflicts. Merely trying to define political orientations theoretically without engaging with history will inevitably be restricted by the horizon of contemporary political culture (Cutrone 2009a).

Understanding contemporary political culture through the failure of past attempts at emancipation is a viable alternative to the perspective of social sciences because it allows to not naturalize contemporary understandings of political orientations. However, since social sciences and politics are not completely separate but influence each other, social science literature must not be disregarded, and can actually provide important insight, when its authoritative definitions are critically considered within the historical and political context. Focussing on the knowledge produced by emancipatory social movements as alternative to the perspective of social sciences (Cox 2013; Cox and Fominaya 2009) helps to clarify how the contemporary political culture of despair, which lacks substantial visions for emancipation, is the fertile grounds for the far-right to strive and appear viable. However, it would be equally wrong to simply affirm the knowledge of emancipatory social movements – after all they not archived their goals. Focussing on what these social movements tried to archive, demands clarifying the societal problems that their sought to overcome. By questioning the authority of both social sciences and social movements, we can recognize emancipation as an unresolved socio-historical issue – one that is not yet fully understood. Furthermore, this issue can only be effectively addressed from within our historical context, which itself reflects the inadequacy of our understanding of the problem. Thus, the goal cannot be to arrive at a final definition of emancipation or striving to find the last word on this topic, but rather to engage in an open inquiry into the issue of emancipation.

Such an open inquiry must find a solution to the challenge, that definitions of the right and the left and its slogans are always contested and ideologically exploited in political conflicts. Even if it were possible to adopt the position of an external observer, uninvolved in these conflicts, we would still encounter a similar problem: Political orientations can only be understood from the standpoint of political orientations (Marvakis 1996). We face a hermeneutic circle in the figurative sense of the word, demanding a second order perspective to become aware of our partiality within societal conflicts. Additionally, this inquiry must also overcome the intellectual vagueness that is emblematic for

definitions of the far-right and fascism. While precise definitions are helpful, there are not sufficient to recognize the complex reality of the interrelation of political culture, societal conflicts and the historical transformation of the political movements themselves. Definitions are always articulated from within these dynamics, of which precise definitions can only be a snapshot of. To effectively address these challenges, I propose understanding political movements in relation to each other, their societal preconditions within the framework of modern mass politics, and what they are opposed to in relation to their understanding of the societal problems they seek to overcome (similar solutions have been suggested f.e. by Landa 2019; Pelinka 2022).

2.3. The concept of the Left

The political spectrum is commonly defined as spanning from left to right, referencing the seating-arrangements of the national assembly during the French revolution. Based on common understandings, the left is defined by its desire to advance social equality and the right as justifying social inequality (Bobbio 1996). While this definition of the left is not wrong, it is a sociological definition centred on values that served and still serve as political slogans for social movements. It leaves out the left's perennial interest in advancing freedom, understood as a concrete reality and not merely a principle. But more importantly, this definition limits the meaning emancipation to what is, or what was. It grasps the utopia of mass emancipation only through existing visions. This perspective is not adequate to clarify the task of emancipation because it does not take emancipation seriously as an unresolved socio-historical issue. This perspective is restricted to a certain (left-wing) historical viewpoint that can only find in social movements what it has already assumed. It cannot move beyond its own historical vantage point.

This limitation can be overcome by understanding the left and the right as directly related to emancipation as unresolved historical task as suggested by Leszek Kołakowski (1969). This perspective demands switching from a sociological explanation to the level of ideas, or consciousness to understand the Left and the Right as historical forces, which are not identical with their historical instances. I follow Kołakowski in capitalizing the Left and the Right when viewing them as historical forces instead of historical instances of left-wing or right-wing movements. In this sense, the Left and the Right do not necessarily correspond to social groups which current or past definitions see as the left and the right, for instance as workers, oppressed or marginalized groups or 'left' social movements versus the capitalists, the ruling class, elites or privileged groups in power.

Instead, this manuscript follows Kołakowski's (1969) *the concept of the Left* in understanding political orientations in relation to history and the production of political culture as an open-ended process, rather than taking established distinctions of political culture as a given horizon to understand politics. According to Kołakowski, the distinction between Left and Right is

relative; it spans from a consciousness of the possibility of change on the Left to a foreclosure of those possibilities on the Right, justifying opportunism and purely tactical politics. However, there are never social movements that are purely left or right. Understanding the Left and the Right as relations, allows for contradictions within movements and individual political orientations. The desire to cleanly separate social movements and individuals in Left and Right is an expression of the prevailing political culture. It presupposes reifying emancipation from being a practical task into an identity, values or simply an attribute.

According to Kołakowski the Left is a historical force that negates the current order by producing new ideas and utopian visions of the future that point beyond given societal restrictions and conflicts, grasping not yet realized possibilities that could be realized in societal revolutions. It “strives to base its prospects on the experience and evolutionary tendencies of history” (Kołakowski 1969:153). The Left and the Right are ‘normal’ societal phenomena inherent to modern politics and its historical preconditions. The inherent creative instability of modern history renders “progressive social movement [...] as normal as reactionary ones,” making it “equally normal for the Left, which is a minority, to be persecuted by the Right” (ibid., 149). The task of the Left is in relation to the Right, to not to persecute the right but to be ahead historically, by advancing consciousness of historic possibilities within the political organisations of the Left, raising political consciousness within the masses, clarifying the task of emancipation in its unique historical context and developing practical political thought.

The Right, in contrast, is an opportunistic force – “the embodiment of the inertia of historical reality” (Kołakowski 1969:153). It takes historic societal restrictions and conflicts as preconditions for a power struggle, embodied in its affirming visions, striving to “idealize actual conditions, not change them. What it needs is fraud not utopia” (ibid., 149). In this sense, the Right is a force foreclosing emancipatory potentials and liquidating the production of new truly utopian ideas. While the “Right is the expression of capitulation to the situation of the moment” (ibid., 153), it must not be confused with stagnation or passivity, nor does it merely reproduce the current order. The Right is often driven by “the desire to revert to a state which was once an accomplished fact” (ibid., 149). Combined with its opportunism it is a powerful force capable of harnessing and organizing discontents for political revolutions that negate the political order but never substantially the societal order. As a historical force of inertia, the right doesn’t need to grasp unrealized historical possibilities. It “has nothing but tactics” (ibid., 153).

Kołakowski’s interpretation of ‘utopia’ is useful for illuminating emancipation as a practical task that defies being defined once and for all. His interpretation is unconventional, having similarities to Bloch’s (Bloch 1935) conception, but being narrower. It views utopia as “a mysterious consciousness of an actual historical tendency” (ibid., 147). While this type of utopia may include certain future visions it isn’t strictly defined by them but by pointing negatively to possibilities. As long as the consciousness of possibilities of

historical changes “lives only a clandestine existence, without finding expression in mass social movements, it gives birth to utopias in the narrower sense, that is, to individually constructed models of the world, as it should be. But in time utopia becomes actual social consciousness; it invades the consciousness of a mass movement and becomes one of its essential driving forces. Utopia, then, crosses over from the domain of theoretical and moral thought into the field of practical thinking, and itself begins to govern human action” (ibid., 147). Emancipation, in this sense, is a practical task, that can be only attempted but never claimed as identity or attribute. In light of their resultant relation to praxis, progressive social movements have to constantly revise themselves and the way they organize if it no longer fits to current realities.

Furthermore, what once was counted as left may have outlived its orientation as such. Opportunism may characterize the historic instances of left-wing politics less than the right-wing politics – but it is a feature of all political movements. Utopian vision can become obsolete by history moving forward or can be assimilated in political culture, regressing from being a living embodiment of historic possibilities to a dogmatic vision how society ought to be. “Slogans like ‘freedom’ and ‘equality’ belong, of course, to the tradition of the Left; but they lost their meaning once they became universal catchwords” that can be interpreted arbitrarily by different political actors (ibid., 150). Slogans which are seen as left in political culture are insufficient to comprehend, if the social movements and political actors that claim these slogans are progressive in the sense of embodying in practical politics a consciousness of the possibility of change, capable to advance emancipation. The Left can always regress from practical political thought, capable of expanding historical possibilities, to moral protest that has little effect on history: “Bleeding-heartism”, encouraged by a culture of indignation and confession as a response to the Right” is not a political position” (ibid., 156). The Left cannot be sufficiently distinguished from the Right by its moral practices and ethics; it “must define itself on the level of ideas, conceding that in many instances it will find itself in the minority” (ibid., 151).

The distinction between opportunistic tactics and visions of not – yet – realized possibilities is crucial to open up a trajectory of inquiry into emancipation as an unresolved socio-historical problem. While it is not wrong that the Right has and is appropriating political inventions of the left, this accusation in itself misses the crucial aspect; that is, the distinction points to the relation of theory and practice as the problem of emancipatory politics. This problem has necessarily emerged only for the Left. It finds reflection in Kolakowski’s interpretation of utopia as “the striving for changes which ‘realistically’ cannot be brought about by immediate action, which lie beyond the foreseeable future and defy planning. [...] Utopia always remains a phenomenon of the world of thought. Even when backed by the power of a social movement and, more importantly, even when it enters its consciousness”, an utopia is inadequate in the present while simultaneously” going far beyond the movement’s potentials. [...] It is a warped attempt to impose upon a historically realistic movement goals that are beyond history” (ibid., 147).

This specific historical situation of the Left, which “gives forth utopias just as the pancreas discharges insulin”, demands from the Left theoretical clarification about historical possibilities (*ibid.*, 147). The Left needs theory that not only points beyond the immediacy of the present situation but must also clarify and raise to consciousness the historical tendency it strives to embody. If the utopia “proves so remote from reality that the wish to enforce it would be grotesque”, it would by necessity “lead to a monstrous deformation, to socially harmful changes threatening the freedom of man. The Left, if it succeeds, would then turn into its opposite—the Right. But then, too, the utopia would cease to be a utopia and become a slogan justifying every current practice” (*ibid.*, 147).

Thus, it is the historical changing relation of theory and practice that distinguishes the Left from the Right. The Right does not need to develop a coherent theory. It subordinates its concepts to its tactics, justifying the current condition. It does not need to understand the relation of theory and practice. This has been described by Walter Benjamin in 1936 as the aestheticization of politics by fascism: It seeks to give the “masses not their right” for practical politics to emancipate themselves, “but instead a chance to express themselves” (Benjamin 1991:506). It is crucial to not confuse this capacity with dishonesty, or the chance to merely express discontents. Clara Zetkin (1923), Wilhelm Reich (1933) and Ernst Bloch (1935) emphasized that fascist politics expressed the necessity of change through the masses, recognizing real contradictions albeit maintaining the unstable capitalist dynamic it rebelled against. They also argued that fascism came to historically express the necessity of change driven by the masses resulted out of the failure of the Left to lead the masses. In this dialectical view, the political problem of the radical right points beyond itself, to the necessity of emancipatory mass politics. It demonstrates that democracy, being the historical form of modern mass politics, is contradictory: Both capable of restoring and enforcing societal restraints through revolutionary anti-politics as well as capable of driving emancipation forward.

However, the Left can always become the Right by aestheticizing either its theory or its politics or both, to give its movements the possibility to merely express that it is on the right side of history, while the Right leads the masses. When the Left is a powerful political force, this regression leads to anti-politics, for instance Stalinism. When lacking influence this regression will result in failing to renew the Left. However, also the Left needs tactics for building a mass movement, but it must understand the historically changing relationship between theory and practical politics as embodied in social movements. It should avoid conflating its utopia with its movement. Emancipation is a practical task, not an identity. Thus, the Left must not have an affirmative relationship but a critical relationship to its movements, otherwise it cannot advance consciousness in the masses of practical politics fit for the practical task of emancipation, to become a subject of history. Thus, political orientations must be a problem for the Left, as long as the task of emancipation is an unresolved socio-historical issue.

2.4. Contemporary Situation

Today, we are confronted with a Left lacking a mass movement. While we can find intellectual contributions scattered within and outside social sciences befitting Kolakowski's description of the Left, political culture is mostly unaffected by these contributions. Conversely, the vanishing of the Left as a mass movement – historically the struggle for socialism of the international workers movement – left a deep mark. The resulting unfettered domination of society by the needs of capital is eroding the civil and political rights embodied in citizenship (Tamás 2002, 2006). The absence of the Left led to a desperate and largely uninspired political culture, limiting the political imagination to the immediacy of the present (Cutrone 2018a). Hannah Arendt (1963) has already observed this loss of significance of the political realm in *On Revolution*. She argued that the revolutionary spirit, which once animated modern political culture and enabled citizens to engage in collective self-determination, has been lost or diminished. Today, Politics is overwhelmingly reduced to managing the present miseries and discontents, often in opportunistic ways. Although this condition provides a fertile ground for the far-right to flourish, the far-right's success has neither caused this condition nor is it the only political actor intensifying this condition. We are facing across the political spectrum¹⁴ “a cluster of policies, practices, routines, and ideologies that [...] *reverses the Enlightenment tendency to assimilate citizenship to the human condition*” (Tamás 2002:203f).

The vanishing of the historic revolutionary Left has not merely torn a gap in political culture, depriving it of emancipatory perspectives. The historic failure of the Left and its regression into Stalinism and other reactionary forms of politics created also a burdening legacy in distorting the contemporary understanding of the task of emancipation. According to Chris Cutrone, perhaps “the most pernicious legacy of Stalinism is its equation of liberalism and capitalism, as if civil and social liberty and freedom is essentially the individual ‘liberty’ of social irresponsibility (whether by individual people or by capitalist firms as corporate individuals) and the ‘freedom’ to exploit and oppress others” (Cutrone 2021a). What the equation of liberalism and capitalism disguises “is that capitalism itself – the domination of society by the imperatives of producing and reproducing capital – undermines the freedom and liberty of bourgeois civil society, not only for the working class but for others as well, including the capitalists” (ibid.).

¹⁴Tamas has coined term post-fascism to analyse the contemporary situation. With post-fascism he refers to “a cluster of policies, practices, routines, and ideologies that can be observed everywhere in the contemporary world; that have little or nothing to do, except in Central Europe, with the legacy of Nazism; that are not totalitarian; that are not at all revolutionary; and that are not based on violent mass movements and irrationalist, voluntaristic philosophies, nor are they toying, even in jest, with anti-capitalism. Post-fascism finds its niche easily in the new world of global capitalism without upsetting the dominant political forms of electoral democracy and representative government. It does what I consider to be central to all varieties of fascism, including the post-totalitarian version. *Sans Führer, sans one-party rule, sans SA or SS, post-fascism reverses the Enlightenment tendency to assimilate citizenship to the human condition*” (Tamás 2002:203f).

Another legacy obstructing the contemporary understanding of emancipation results from an insufficient historic differentiation of two kinds of 'socialism' – the Marxist and Rousseauian version (Tamás 2006, 2018). According to G. M. Tamás most conceptions of emancipation, including avowedly Marxists, are shaped by the Rousseauian understanding. In the Marxist understanding, emancipation can only be described negative, as task for liberating the potential of humanity that is alienated in capital. The working class was seen as the subject carrying out this task. Its crucial role was to abolish itself to archive a free political community because the working class was seen to be implicated in recreating the conditions of not only its own oppression but the domination of society as a whole by capital. Thus, the task of emancipation required theoretical and historical clarification.

In the Rousseauian version of emancipation the negative understanding of emancipation is replaced with the belief that "an equal, dignified and just society comes about through equality, usually equality obtained through redistribution" (Tamás 2018:47). The task of the political subject of emancipation is not to abolish itself, but to fight its oppressors, to which it is seen as morally superior: the emancipatory subject needs a villain in the Rousseauian shaped imagination. The "meaning of Rousseauian socialism is the re-establishment of the purity of the people through the forcible destitution of the upper castes [...]; the people is held to be capable of discovering its virtue, which has been obliterated or corrupted by oppression and inequality, servitude and deference" (Tamás 2006:247). This vision has always had a powerful influence on the struggle for proletarian socialism; egalitarianism "and statism (in democratic and tyrannical versions) were the hallmarks of the main official versions of socialism, everywhere" (ibid., 241). With the vanishing of proletarian struggle for socialism in the 20th century the working class was gradually substituted as subject of emancipation with different notions of the oppressed people (Wood 1998), ultimately leading to a "new cross-class coalition of rebellious 'people' desirous of a new kind of [Rousseauian inspired] democracy" (Tamás 2006:249). Overall, this shift eclipsed the negative understanding of the task of emancipation, that requires historical and theoretical clarification, with a specific historic vision of emancipation. This shift contributed to the reduction of politics to the immediacy of the present – politics as matters of policies, principles and values; the possibilities of politics limited to preset rules of given institutions, devoid of the revolutionary spirit of collective self-determination.

The Rousseauian legacy in conjuncture with the growing cultural influence of psychology (see chapter one) contributed to a situation, in which it seems natural to control and or change the subjectivity of individuals, such as far-right orientations, because they appear as the driving forces expanding the ills of society. This personalization of discontents is not limited to far-right orientations but rooted in a powerful historical tendency to locate society's ill in subjectivity (Frawley 2024). A crucial aspect of this situation is the identification of motives and actions (see 1.8.), fostering a political imagination in which political conflicts appearing as conflicts between identities. This political imagination hinders a dialectical understanding of the far-right as indicating the necessity of

mass politics for the Left and its responsibility to overcome the immediacy of present, in which only opportunism appears feasible.

Moreover, the pernicious cultural legacy of Stalinism – the equation of liberalism with capitalism – contributed to a situation in which the prevailing political attempts to mobilize against the far-right appear as hypocritical opportunism, defending a situation of unfreedom as freedom¹⁵. When non-far-right politicians “say, our free community is threatened [...]! Up in arms! Save liberal democracy, save market capitalism, save inequality from the incursions of all sorts of unpleasant people!” the people will say: ‘oh, yeah, right? Should we save a system that does not give us anything nice except cheap merchandise?’ So, people will not” (Tamás 2018:47f). The tragic of this situation is not so much the far-right appears as liberator of insincere morally disguised opportunism, but that the left falls into this trap instead of calling out the fraud of urging political action that won’t change the underlying problem, of being confronted with “two version of the same system: one hypocritical version, pretending to represent equality and liberty, and another that does not” (ibid., 46).

Today, a substantial and ambitious political perspective to advance the task of emancipation is largely absent from the present political culture (Cutrone 2012, 2018a). This *Zeitgeist* includes social movements that are contemporary considered as left, because they have in large replaced advancing politically a consciousness of historic possibilities by either assuming that only ‘resistance’ is possible or by dogmatically copying what they consider as past instances of the historic revolutionary Left (Cutrone 2008b). What is left of the left has overwhelmingly resorted to the management of contemporary miseries and discontents within current societal preconditions, replacing politics with policies or withdrawn from politics to sectarianism. The left “has fallen apart into either accommodating capitalist politics through welfare statism or accommodating society’s disintegration in capitalism” (Cutrone 2021a).

Being fixated on the horizon of the prevailing political culture the left frequently engages in political conflicts by fighting its opponents, with the prevailing political culture determining who the opponents are. It falls into the trap of capitalist politics in invoking the threat of fascism and societal crisis as means to mobilize instead of finding practical ways to manifest politically unrealized historical possibilities that point a way forward. Activities of this ‘left’ are overwhelmingly focused on defending democracy against the far-right, trying to fight oppression and discrimination, criticising the right and those in power,

¹⁵As Tamas puts it passionately: “A real free political community must consist of free people. What does it mean to be a free political community that consists of exploited people under the command of the most stringent and brutal set of rules called technology? A work discipline and a time, a use of time, subordinated to a production of commodities. You enter an office, you enter a shop, you enter a factory and your autonomy disappears. And this is where you are spending the majority of your waking hours. What kind of a political community of free citizens can this be? This is obviously an illusion. And it has been proved many times to be an illusion, and of course there is the discontent, the humiliation [...]. Humiliation of people of colour, humiliation of white people, humiliation of poor and even humiliation of not-so-poor people by being dependent – even my intellectual colleagues, writing their submissions for grants, everybody collecting their points, everybody trying to get good marks in exams – there is not one single moment of independence. Is this a free society? That is ridiculous! Well, let us stop pretending and being hypocrites” (Tamás 2018:48).

and demanding for some degree redistributive politics, though often on an unambitious scale. Instead of interrogating its inherited vision to expand it, the 'left' has accepted the ahistorical cultural distinctions of the left and the right as identities, values or principles, which foreclosed an understanding of how past failures of left social movements have resulted in the current limitations of political culture, from which the far-right benefits (Cutrone 2023).

The immediacy of the present cannot be transcended by simply advocating for an ostensibly emancipatory unity of theory and practice. This approach subordinates theory to the demands of immediate practice¹⁶, such as combating the far right with the means at hand, ultimately reducing theoretical reflection on the meaning of emancipation to a mere tool in service of justifying short-term political actions (Adorno 1973:143f, 1977). This approach contributed to a lack of emancipatory agency, fostering a political culture of despair. Year-long efforts to combat the far-right, educating about the strategies of the far-right and raising awareness about their danger seem to have been in vain. This must appear even more desperate when we consider that those efforts have been supported by the social sciences, equipping the fight against the far right with substantial criticism since the UNESCO statements on race 1950, 1951 and subsequent declarations (Balibar 2005; Banton 2008; Miles and Brown 2003; UNESCO 1952). Not to speak of the World Conference Against Racism 1978, 1983, 2001, 2009 and 2021 and the multitude of declarations and statements against all forms of discrimination, since the Universal Declaration of Human Rights in 1948. Indeed, the social sciences have suggested a multitude of explanations for the emergence of the far right, providing insights in its societal preconditions and its transformations (Balibar 1991; Taguieff 2001), to combat not only the far-right but all forms of oppression to strive for social justice to overcome social inequality (Fraser 2022). No doubt the success of the far-right is a challenge to the achievements, that those statements embody. This situation tasks us to reconsider the relation of theory and practice withing the relationship of social sciences to politics. Who will overtake whom? Or rather, who has overtaken whom?

The challenge posed by the far-right to the Left is not simply a matter of finding more effective ways to politically isolate and control the Right while maintaining the status quo. Rather, it involves confronting and overcoming the regression of the left itself. The left has regressed by being fixated on a horizon that resulted from of failed attempts of the historic Left to bring about emancipation. This led in the subjection of the (production of) theory of the left to the demands of its practice, merely affirming struggles against oppression, instead of clarifying the historical meaning of these struggles. The Right is not to blame for this outcome because this is what the Right does: foreclosing emancipation. It is the responsibility of the Left to find a way forward.

¹⁶“The call for unity of theory and practice has irresistibly degraded theory to a servant’s role, removing the very traits it should have brought to that unity. The visa stamp of practice which we demand of all theory became a censor’s placet. Yet whereas theory succumbed in the vaunted mixture, practice became nonconceptual, a piece of the politics it was supposed to lead out of; it became the prey of power. The liquidation of theory by dogmatization and thought taboos contributed to the bad practice; the recovery of theory’s independence lies in the interest of practice itself” (Adorno 1973:143).

The task today is not merely about ‘learning’ from the mistakes of the past, but to clarify the task of emancipation by understanding what emancipatory movements tried to archive but failed to do so, while grasping the role of the Left within these movements. This task of historical self-reflection demands that we estrange the limiting cultural understanding of political orientations and their desirability by examining them as historically evolving relationships between theory and practice. This perspective can overcome the culturally dominant reified view of political orientations, such as the practice of categorizing them according to more or less arbitrary criteria.

Crisis talk

The predominant response to the success of the new far-right parties and currents frames them as danger of society sliding towards fascism, calling upon the democratic spectrum to prevent barbarism from happening again, urging to learn from history, by aligning with established political parties. In determining if the new far-right as fascist or not political commentator, intellectuals and social scientists mostly apply a ‘shopping list’ or an ‘ideal-type’ approach (Renton 2001:x–xvii, 2024). However, this approach does rarely generate critical insights about the new convergence of the right, nor was it successful in excluding the far-right politically (Renton 2019). The new far-right parties appear more than ever to a substantial section of the population and the political as viable and legitimate political orientation to solve social problems.

No doubt the danger of the current situation must not be underestimated. However, subscribing to apocalyptic visions, the opposite of the previously discussed utopian ones, must be avoided. Such visions do not present an adequate analysis of the situation. Instead of an analysis, they represent ‘crisis-talk’ (Marvakis 2022; Marvakis, Triliva, and Tourtouras 2016). Crisis-talk that is driven by such visions tends to naturalize the loss of agency and the feeling of powerlessness, thereby disguising that what we ‘see’ as a ‘crisis’ is “*produced* by powerful political actions” (Marvakis 2022:152). Crisis-talk is not limited to commentators officially aligned with the status quo but also ubiquitous in analysis produced by critical social sciences. Although differently intended, these analyses contribute often to the reification of political actions, by framing these action as anonymous processes. Indeed, many of the phenomena “we attribute much too readily to the sheer factuality of some ‘crisis’ are, in fact, *produced* by powerful elites and *labeled* by authoritative social scientists” (ibid.).

All this crisis talk arguably has pernicious effects that undermine emancipation. This situation demands careful consideration. The failure of past attempts to solve the problem of the far-right has contributed to a loss of agency in emancipatory politics. Calls to try harder to delegitimize and exclude the far-right politically should be questioned, instead of blindly followed. Indeed, the predominance of such responses as answers to the problem of the far-right unveils a more fundamental issue: the progressive political imagination lacks plausible and credible pathways for emancipation.

Instead of suggesting a way forward by bringing to consciousness the emancipatory potential implicit in society but yet to be realized, progressive political orientations often urge an uncritical identification of society with the status quo. This is combined with promises that the only way out of misery is increased social control in the name of defending society from its assumed enemies. This results in campism (La Botz 2022), pressuring individuals to identify with the 'right' cause and to 'stand on the right side of history': 'Either you are for us or against us'. Social pressure is intensified by such crisis narratives.

Instead of promoting 'crisis talk', analysis and critical theory have to point a way forward. Simply describing how things are – or more precise how things appear – and taking a stance against how things are is not sufficient. Reproducing the current political culture of despair in theory and analysis must be considered as a failure to move beyond the oppressive immediacy of the present. Such theory and analysis can indeed be questioned for lacking a truly critical stance, instead serving to justify the status quo and the inadequate efforts to move beyond the current state of misery. We should face the sobering reality that contemporary critical theory is that it is no longer critical (Pippin 2004).

These developments – the lack of critical theory and emancipatory practice worthy of the name, alongside prevalent crisis-talk – have led to an unintended yet troubling alliance across the entire political spectrum, which significantly benefits the far-right. Facing this situation tasks us, as Marvakis suggest, to reconsider Adorno's warning "to let neither the power of others, nor our own powerlessness, stupefy us" (Adorno 1974:57). In the words of Kolakowski: When the Left realizes that "it is powerless in the face of crime, it refuses to call crime a 'blessing'" (Kolakowski 1969:157). The task is, of course, not become stupefied, or label a crime a blessing, but to facilitate a substantial, historically-grounded change of perspective.

To summarize, the futility of the desperate situation appears in a different light when recognizing how the prevailing political imagination limits and restrains thinking about political orientations. The prevailing solutions for the problem of the far-right are rooted in unquestioned premises about political orientation, that are embedded in the immediacy of the present political culture. I suggest seeing this focus on the present as a regression, which was not produced by the right, but unintentionally by an alliance across the political spectrum. To understand how far initially emancipatory approaches to politics have regressed, it is worthwhile to recall Sartre's discernment about what can be done about the problem of antisemitism.

Shift in Perspective

Sartre warns convincingly in his *Reflections of the Jewish Question* written in 1946, about "illusions about the effectiveness of" today's solutions: "it is not enough to appeal to the free will of the anti-Semite through propaganda, education, and legal prohibitions. Since the anti-Semite, like every person,

represents a free will conditioned by the situation, it is the situation that we must fundamentally change. One must fundamentally change the opportunities for self-determination to transform the ego-choice. This does not affect the free will directly, but the free will decides based on different circumstances and with regard to other formations” (Sartre 1986:187 my translation).

Further clarification of the task demands considering that Sartre’s statement can be interpreted in the prevailing political culture as a necessity to exclude the antisemite or right wingradicals. However, Sartre conceived of such solutions as illusions arguing that “laws have never embarrassed and will never embarrass the anti-Semite, who conceives of himself belonging to a mystical society outside the bounds legality. We may pile up regulations and prohibitions, but they will always emanate from official France, while the antisemite claims to be the representative of the ‘true’ France” (Sartre 1986:186f my translation).

What is required is a fundamental “shift in perspective, whereby people are not seen as objects of societal formation, but as potential subjects of its development [...]. Instead of accepting the conditions as unquestionable frameworks for individual as well as scientific thinking and action from the outset, and categorizing individuals according to their ‘development’ or usability, thereby participating in the legitimization of the exclusion of the ‘non-belongers,’ the conditions themselves should be questioned for their legitimacy” (Osterkamp 1996:218). This shift in perspective implies questioning the conditions under which it seems reasonable to categorize individuals according to their (psychological) development as democratic citizens, thus demanding and legitimizing the exclusion of those with undesirable political orientations. However, this “shift in perspective is only complete when it applies to all people without exception, including those who exclude others – because the exclusion of the excluders dissolves the boundaries between them” (Osterkamp 1996:218).

2.5. The historic Marxist Vision

Sarte’s and Osterkamp’s pronouncements should not be seen as a mere clarion call for therapeutic practice to shift to a more inclusive perspective. The required shift demands an emancipatory imagination which does not limit emancipatory visions to partiality, but to take up the challenge of fundamental emancipation for everyone. However, taking this demand serious results in a contradictory task: The required shift in perspective requires from the emancipatory imagination escaping both the present misery, under which a substantial increase in freedom seems unfeasible, and the temptation of abstract utopia as a naïve dream of a better world, were deadly far-right politics have dispersed – this would be a denial of contemporary conflicts and conditions. To address these challenges that are inherent to modern politics, I argue that it is worthwhile to revisit the original Marxist vision because it developed in face of these challenges and had to critically renew itself in its history, when this vision was facing its own crisis. I do not suggest either adopting it as a dogma nor as mere inspiration, but to investigate the vision critically to advance our understanding of the problem of

political orientations as historical relations of theory and practice. Let us first get a rough idea about the vision.

The original Marxist vision, distinguished from its Stalinist and neo-stalinist perversions, assumed that a fundamental emancipatory transformation of our modern capitalist society is plausible. The Marxist vision is rooted in its theoretical understanding of the task of emancipation, which was seen as intertwined with the problem of capitalism. The vision asserted that a specific form of politics is necessary for the transformation, capable to fulfil the promises of liberalism by extending democracy. The emancipatory horizon of the latter, rooted in the enlightenment philosophy, was seen being contradicted by the inequities and heightened contradictions spurred by the industrial revolution. Bourgeois society was “not meant to be torn down but transcended in overcoming capitalism” (Cutrone 2011a). Following this path meant not, as many lay interpretations of Marxism claim, merely denying capitalism, but drawing on its productive and dynamic capabilities to transcend it by realizing its inherent potential for emancipation.

The original Marxist vision directed the emancipatory imagination to desire moving beyond the antagonisms of contemporary capitalist society towards “an association in which the free development of each is the condition for the free development of all” (Marx and Engels 1848:482). This perspective did not ignore the conflicts and antagonism of its time but recognized those as false necessities of capitalism. ‘False’ because they are not unchangeable. ‘Necessary’ because the underlying needs behind these conflicts are no delusions and not merely false consciousness but grounded in real nevertheless opposed needs, produced and reproduced by the contradiction of capitalism. This vision, rooted in the Marxist conception of political practice, tasked emancipatory politics to encompass a wide spectrum of conflicting discontents. The goal was to politically manifest societal contradictions and advance consciousness beyond the immediacy of the false necessity of opposed needs. To this end, Marxist theory aimed to grasp political orientations as part of the contradictory totality of society.

However, we will not arrive at substantial answers to the contemporary challenges of emancipation within and outside therapy by simply adopting the Marxist vision that had its roots in the political struggle for socialism as a response to the effects of the industrial revolution. Not only have there been multiple ‘Marxisms’ and fierce battles between them. Marxist theory cannot be taken from one historical situation and applied to another. Marxist dialectics is not a social science but a specific form of theory *and* political practice. Social sciences, in contrast, while also having a relation to politics, cannot claim to have such a direct relation to specific form of politics. This lacking relation arguably makes them a conservative force, serving the needs of the respective politics. Common interpretations of Marxism assume that it would seek the unity of theory and practice, referring to Marx’s famous 11th thesis on Feuerbach (1845:7), engraved on Marx’s tomb: “Philosophers have only interpreted the world, in various ways; the point, however, is to change it”.

However, less understood is that the relation of theory and practice was not identical throughout the history of Marxism. The relationship between theory and

practice has been critically examined throughout the history of Marxist theory, especially in efforts to understand Marxism's own historical crises. These critiques often applied the dialectical method to Marxism itself, seeking to confront its internal contradictions. The problem of historically changing relations of theory and practice was discovered in some regards by Georg Lukács in his *History and Class Consciousness* (1923). and more extensively elaborated on by Karl Korsch (1923) in *Marxism and Philosophy*. The latter discussed explicitly “the historically changing relation of theory and practice, and the self-consciousness of this problem, in the history of Marxism. This meant that the matter was, from a Marxian perspective, as Adorno put it in *Negative Dialectics*, ‘not settled once and for all, but fluctuates historically’” (Cutrone 2010a).

Both Korsch and Lukacs tried to grasp theoretically how Marxist such as Rosa Luxemburg and Lenin engaged with the crisis of the Second International, when its social democratic parties with Marxist leadership were in support of the first world war, affiliating themselves with the national war efforts. In the crisis of the Second International Marxist theory and practice became fixated on its own past, thus regressing when it faced new historical challenges to being a mere dogma equated with a simplified social scientific description of society from a ‘Marxist’ perspective. The understanding of dialectics became mechanical and emmeshed into the past success of the socialist movement in the form of social democracy. This perspective failed to grasp how the social democracy itself started to manifest the contradictions of capitalism that were advanced by the socialist movement. It had to rediscover how to ‘be’ Left in the sense of Kolakowski advocated for.

Yet, already Marx and Engels were concerned with the problem of changing relations of theory and practice, without defining the problem in these terms. They did not identify Marxism with the struggle for socialism, the workers movement or its institutions. Being actively involved and not mere observers, they sought to contribute to the self-clarification the historical meaning of the struggle for socialism. They asserted that the struggle for socialism and the larger political orientation of the workers movement were stuck in an inherited and limited horizon for emancipation; one initially guided the French revolution but made obsolete and contradicted in capitalism. They found the “necessity of the dialectic [...] in the self-contradictory character of not only capitalism but of the struggle to overcome it in socialism. Marxism has its origins in the dialectical critique of capitalism which also includes — at its core — the dialectical critique of socialism” (Cutrone 2021b).

Today, the negative character of the Marxist dialectics has been largely forgotten because Marxist theory has been turned predominantly into a descriptive tool highlighting the pitfalls of capitalism. Marx saw capitalism as “a contradiction and crisis of society, a contradiction of its self-understanding and self-consciousness” (ibid.). The dialectical conception of theory and practice allowed Marxist to clarify anew the meaning of emancipation in relation to the problem of capitalism it sought to address through politics.

Lukács argued that even if “research had conclusively demonstrated the factual inaccuracy of all individual statements by Marx, any serious Marxist

could” unconditionally acknowledge” such a reality, and “reject all individual theses by Marx — without having to abandon” their dialectical method (Lukács 1923:35). Lukács emphasizes that the meaning of Marxism refers to the dialectical method of historical self-clarification. Marxism was “not the ‘belief’ in this or that thesis, nor the exegesis of a ‘sacred’ book” (ibid.). Marxists did not come “with blueprints for an emancipated society in hand. [They...] advocated pursuing the forms of the struggle for socialism that had emerged historically in and through the development of the workers’ movement itself. Historical Marxism did not formulate independent schemes for emancipation, but sought the potential social-emancipatory content of emergent political phenomena in light of history. [...] Marxists] advocated the workers’ right to rule, but followed other [non-marxist] socialists in doing so” (Cutrone 2011b).

Thus, the question if the Marxist vision should be adopted or if it is still plausible is a misleading question because it overlooks the more fundamental problem that has to be addressed first: The problem of the historical changing relation between theory and practice. Indeed, the history of Marxism, its origin, its crisis and renewal and ultimately its failure made it necessary for Marxists to discover and rediscover this problem through the method of dialectics. This constant task of revision is precisely the value of the engagement with Marxism – not as a dogma, theory or method to be applied, but as a series of attempts for the historical self-clarification of the task of emancipation under historical changing relations of theory and practice. Reengaging in the clarification of the problem of political orientations as historically changing relations of theory and practice provides a pathway to move beyond the limits that the prevailing political culture poses on finding answers to the problem of the far-right and emancipation. The value of this approach lies in its negativity, meaning that it does not prescribe specific solutions to these problems but instead fosters new and creative responses to contemporary challenges – both in therapy and beyond. It achieves this task by estranging our cultural preconceptions about political orientations, thus potentially contributing to a critical historical consciousness about the possibility of change, and advancing our comprehension of the emergence of emancipatory motives. To archive this goal, we must consider what an appropriate approach to Marxism is today, since the Marxist vision cannot simply be adopted.

2.6. The Marxist Wager

Marxism has been described as a wager (Goldmann 1964; MacIntyre 1971) on the possibility of fundamentally transforming our modern capitalist society through political action, realizing its inherent emancipatory possibilities by appropriating capital’s potential for freedom. Describing Marxism as a wager emphasizes that no certainty of outcome can be claimed, nor can the emancipatory transcendence of capitalism be guaranteed. This perspective distinguishes Marxism from other political orientations, which make different assumptions about the future – such as the belief that abandoning capitalism

would inevitably lead to worse outcomes, restricting emancipation and democracy even more than under capitalism. Is Marxism as a wager plausible as approach?

What is certain, however, is that historical Marxism has failed. Its “failure [...] was profound. Hence, there is no Marxism to return to. There is no answer, only a question. The question is the failure of Marxism” (Cutrone 2012:3). This failure directs us to the history of Marxism, particularly its crises. Historical Marxism has renewed itself by grasping its historically changing relation of theory and practice through its entangled history with capitalism. Dialectical self-criticism was used to understand how Marxism manifested the contradictions of capitalism in its own history through splits and contradictions, such as the revisionist debate and the collapse of the Second International. These fissures made necessary and possible, at the same time, the dialectical critique of Marxism and the workers' movement by Rosa Luxemburg, Lenin, Trotsky, and others. From the 1848 revolutions onwards Marxism was repeating and escalating through these dialectics societal contradictions and crises on a higher and more dramatic level, culminating in the revolutions of 1917-1919 (Cutrone 2021b).

Marxism has failed to bring about the societal emancipation it strived for. The failure contributed to the catastrophes of the 20th century: The rise of fascism and in particular Nazism, the Holocaust, World War II and the atomic bomb. We live in a historical situation where there is no revolutionary proletariat in sight. Additionally, one could argue, from a counterfactual perspective, that the workers' movement might have been more successful in the end without Marxism. We could entertain the thought that the dominance of Marxism, pushing for proletarian socialism, was actually the decline of the workers movement, and that other forms of socialism, such as anarchism, feminist or utopian socialism could have advanced the task of emancipation beyond what Marxism archived.

Setting aside the counterfactual perspective, the possibility must be considered, “that the potential Marxism expressed missed its chance, and has carried on only in a degenerate, spectral way, until passing effectively into history” (Cutrone 2010c). However, the Marxist wager is entangled with the fate of capital, whose potential for freedom it seeks to appropriate. Since capital holds unbroken historical significance, the obsolescence of Marxism can be doubted, but it cannot be rejected either, especially as Marxism is now disentangled from the workers' movement.

This condition of our contemporary situation turns the wager into a true dilemma. It is often resolved by dogmatism or an existential leap into a quasi-religious creed or otherwise structured set of believes. However, such resolutions would fall short of the scientific dialectics of Marxism, as articulated by Lukács and Korsch, which seek historical self-clarification rather than immediate solutions. Such an existential leap would not realise the needed estrangement of our cultural preconceptions to advance our understanding of the emergence of emancipatory motives. It would not provide insights into political orientations as

historically changing relations of theory and practice. Thus, the Marxist wager cannot be a foundation for this inquiry.

2.7. The Marxist hypothesis

Instead of the wager, I suggest to use the Marxist hypothesis as put forth by Chris Cutrone (2010c). The Marxist hypothesis understands modern history of mass politics and emancipation through the lens of “the history of capital and its potential overcoming, as expressed in the history of Marxism¹⁷ [...]”. This would be a history of the emergence, crisis, and decline of Marxism as expressing the possibility of getting beyond capital, as Marx and the best Marxists understood this” (ibid.). However, this is not a linear history of events, but an inquiry into how the different ‘Marxisms’ understood the problem of capitalism tasking emancipation and how past attempts failing to solve this problem have resulted through the political regression of the left in our contemporary limits in imagining emancipation. In this sense, the Marxist hypothesis can be seen as a methodological device for estranging our cultural preconceptions of emancipation, political orientations and their contemporary desirability.

According to Cutrone the “Marxist hypothesis is that Marx’s thought and [the subsequent Marxist] politics correspond to a moment of profound transformation in the history of modern society, indeed, in the history of humanity: the rise of ‘industrial capital’ and of the concomitant ‘social-democratic’ workers’ movement that attended this change” (Cutrone 2010c). While the plausibility of the Marxist vision can be debated, it cannot be denied that Marxism was the most encompassing attempt at a fundamental emancipatory transform of modern industrialized society that reached an impact on the world scale. In this sense, the historical fate of Marxism is intimately intertwined with the development of modern politics after 1848.

This unique entanglement of Marxism with modern politics makes it possible to illuminate the history of modern emancipation through the history of Marxism and its self-criticism. This justifies the core assumption of the hypothesis “that Marxism, as a perspective and politics, could be the vital nerve center of modern history” (ibid.). The Marxist hypothesis seeks “to grasp the history of the specifically modern society of capital, the different historical phases of capital as characterized by Marx’s and other Marxists’ accounts, beginning in the mid-19th century” (ibid.). The 19th century’s discovery of history marked a profound realization: humanity is not just passively shaped by external forces, but actively engages in its historical self-transformation. History, therefore, is not just a chronicle of events but the unfolding record of humanity’s ongoing “self-production; it is the activity of a historical being recovering the past into a present which anticipates the future” (Preuss 1986:1).

¹⁷“It is divided into the different periods in the history of Marxism: from 1848–95, the publication of Marx and Engels’s *Communist Manifesto* to Engels’s death, to 1914–19, the crisis of Marxism in war and revolution; and from 1923–40, post-Bolshevik Marxism, to 1968–89, the “New Left” and the collapse of ‘Communism’” (Cutrone 2010c).

The problem of history is, for Marx, capital. The “hypothesis is that capital is the source of what Kant called ‘universal history’”(Cutrone 2010c). We must at first understand what Kant meant by universal history, before moving to Marx. Kant (1784b) argued that ‘universal history’ was essential for emancipation because it was not just a record of past events but a tool for guiding humanity towards freedom and autonomy. By viewing history as a reason-driven process, individuals could align their actions with principles that promote human development and overcome ignorance and oppression. He believed that without such a perspective, nations might remain trapped in cycles of conflict and competition. Universal history, therefore, fosters the recognition of a common human destiny, encouraging peaceful and cooperative relations – echoing Adam Smith's (1776) ideas on economic interdependence and mutual benefit.

Marx's version of universal history recognizes the industrial revolution as an inflection point giving rise to both undreamt-of potentials for human freedom as well as oppression and self-destruction. Marx distinguished “the moment of industrial capital as marking the crisis in modern society—or even, an event and crisis in ‘natural history’ – in which humanity faced the choice”, epitomized in Luxemburg's expression ‘socialism or barbarism’, stated during the first World War (Cutrone 2010c). For humanity to realize capital's potential for freedom, humanity would need to be appropriated capital consciously and realize it's potential by transforming society. If humanity would fail to do so, it would be continued to be dominated by capital as alienated objective totality.

Marx recognized that the “classical bourgeois forms of politics that had emerged in the preceding era of the rise of manufacturing capital in the 17th and 18th centuries, liberalism and democracy, proved to be inadequate to the problems and tasks of modern society since the 19th century” (ibid.). These problems result according to Marx from capital giving rise to opposing but real needs, resulting in endless cycles of new societal conflicts, unforeseen by the enlightenment radicals, where attempts to resolve the problems of society were rendered contradictory, perpetuating the problems they sought to overcome. The bourgeois horizon for emancipation, Kant's universal history, was not capable to reckon with the contradictory nature of capital driving these conflicts. According to Marx, this new situation demanded “to press further the gains of historically ‘bourgeois’ liberal democracy” by expanding mass politics, cultivating a new collective and critical consciousness (Cutrone 2011b). This possibility was for Marx “expressed in the workers’ demand for *social* democracy, which Marx thought needed to be raised to greater self-consciousness to achieve its aims” (ibid.). Otherwise, it would not be capable of recognizing the reality of opposing needs as a false necessity, resulting from the failed appropriation of capital's potential for freedom.

This required a dialectical approach to politics because moving beyond the partiality of opposing needs could only be achieved from within the conflicting societal reality. Transcending the partial perspectives demanded the standpoint of a new universal history – which Marx found embodied in capital. Thus, Marxists did not come “with blueprints for an emancipated society in hand. [...] They] advocated pursuing the forms of the struggle for socialism that had emerged

historically in and through the development of the workers' movement itself. Historical Marxism did not formulate independent schemes for emancipation, but sought the potential social-emancipatory content of emergent political phenomena in light of history" (Cutrone 2011b), included Marxism itself – especially in times of crisis.

In contrast to the wager, the failure of Marxism serves in the Marxist hypothesis as a crucial moment to inquire into the historically changing relation of theory and practice – not only of Marxism, but of the Left as a whole, in the sense articulated by Kolakowski. Thus, this failure provides a unique perspective to clarify the meaning of emancipation, by taking it serious as an unresolved socio-historical issue. As Cutrone argues (Cutrone 2010c):

While Marx and Engels had written of the 'specter' of communism, today it is the memory of Marx that haunts the world. This difference is important to register: Marx and Engels could count on a political movement – communism – that they sought to clarify and raise to self-consciousness of its historical significance. Today, by contrast, we need to remember not the historical political movement so much as the form of critical consciousness given expression in Marxism (ibid.).

By focussing on the failure of the Left the perspective of the Marxist hypothesis seeks to grasp the history of radical antipolitics, which haunts the contemporary political imagination. While the Right appears to strive on the contemporary contradictions and preconditions, which are – alter all – marked by the absence of a powerful Left, the left needs to clarify how these contradictions and preconditions relate to the task of emancipation. The Marxist hypothesis helps us to see through contemporary representations of politics as abstract principles that oppose each other to different degree (such as democratic vs authoritarian politics). This would reduce the task of emancipation to fighting 'anti-emancipatory' currents.

By focusing on the failure of the Left, the perspective of the Marxist hypothesis seeks to understand the history of radical antipolitics that haunts contemporary political thought. While the Right seems to thrive on the contradictions and preconditions of today – conditions marked by the absence of a powerful Left – the Left must clarify how these same contradictions and preconditions relate to the task of emancipation. The Marxist hypothesis helps us see through contemporary representations of politics, which are often framed as opposing abstract principles (such as democratic vs. authoritarian politics). This narrow framing reduces emancipation to the task of merely combating 'anti-emancipatory' forces.

The Marxist hypothesis warns us of such illusions and encourages us to understand democracy, liberalism, socialism, conservatism, the far-right and fascism as contradictory, historically changing *and* interrelated phenomena, that are *necessary* expression of a society that is not only dominated by the needs of capital that needs to reckon politically with its domination by capital. For Marx, the historic significance and distinguishing feature of socialism (or communism) as a political movement did not lie in the consciousness it expressed – it was to him as bourgeois as other forms of politics – but in its embodiment of a

contradiction that pointed beyond itself. To Marx, this contradiction signaled the potential to overcome society's "need for 'bourgeois' politics per se. But this was to be achieved through the politics of the demands for *bourgeois* rights of the working class [...]. Marx sought the potential in capital of going beyond demands for greater liberalism and democracy. Subsequent 'communism' lost sight of Marx on this, and disintegrated into the 20th century antinomy of socialism and liberalism. The Marxist hypothesis is that Marx recognized the possibility, not of opposition, but of a qualitative transformation, in, through, and beyond bourgeois society" (Cutrone 2010c).

Recalling this critical consciousness, rooted in historical Marxism, helps us steer clear of the illusion that the task of emancipation can be replaced by quick theoretical or political solutions. Whether it's the desire to exclude political orientations deemed undesirable from a particular standpoint in contemporary political conflicts, or the promise offered to professions such as therapists and social scientists to secure a position of power in managing society's ills in seemingly benevolent ways, these shortcuts divert from the deeper, ongoing work required for true emancipation. The suggested approach recognizes instead the insufficiency of all political orientations today for the task of emancipation; or more precisely as being alienated from the task of emancipation. Developing a conscious recognition of the desire to abandon the clarification of the task of emancipation in favor of immediate politics can inspire us to take up this task again by making us aware of what we miss. In chapters four and five, I have elaborated on how this recognition can advance our understanding of cultivating emancipatory motives by building on the insights of Ágnes Heller and Georg Lukács and connecting these insights to theories and debates in Critical Psychology.

The Marxist hypothesis instructs us, "today, to view the history of the modern society of capital through the figure of Marx" (Cutrone 2010c). But doing so can only be done by critically examining the history of the wagers of Marxism, which entails understanding Marxism as a historically situated theory-practice relationships – in plural as 'marxisms' – that have not (yet) brought about the emancipation from capital. While Marxism has failed, its memory remains, embodied not in the spectre of communism – as in the time of Marx – but in the spectre of Marx and Marxism, which continues to haunt the political imagination to this day. The Marxist hypothesis guides us through the spectre of Marxism(s) as a series of attempts of historical self-clarification of the socio-historical unresolved task of emancipation to rediscover the specific form of critical consciousness Marxism gave rise to. Thus, the wager of Marxism remains – even in its most regressive and dogmatic forms. So does capital and history. And with it, the historical task of overcoming the alienation of our present condition that cultivates across the political spectrum the collective experience of existential threat, despair and the anticipation of the loss of agency, on which the Right knows to thrive. This alienation is reflected in a political culture that lacks a living embodiment of the concrete utopia of freedom and harbors a deep-seated pessimism about the emancipatory potential of subjectivity. This culture limits the political imagination, restricting the horizon of emancipation to the

suffocating immediacy of the present, which has itself moved through many political mediations to reach the reified immediacy that almost totally obscures the trajectory of emancipation.

Yet, paradoxically, rediscovering the limits of contemporary political culture through this history of the failure of the Left might advance our understanding of the task of emancipation and the cultivation of emancipatory motives. The historical perspective of capital as the source for universal history unfolds a standpoint, capable of overcoming the immediacy of the false necessity of opposed but real needs. Thus, the Marxist hypothesis might provide us with crucial insights into the problem of political orientations, which are absent in the prevailing political culture. It advances our understanding of political orientations as contradictory phenomena related to attempts to solve the problems of capitalism, tasks the Left with emancipation, and urges us to rethink the problem of political orientations rather than reifying societal conflicts and opposed needs by personalizing political orientations.

Part Two

Chapter 3: Political Culture and Subjective Responses to the Far-Right: Overcoming Present Limitations

I think it is not an exaggeration to claim that the prevailing response to the emergence and successes of far-right parties is to define the present as a crisis, which is understood as a call to action to defend ‘the’ or ‘our’ ‘democracy’. Those calls to actions don’t specify what is understood by democracy but are in effect a more or less authoritarian restriction of democracy with the pretence of avoiding undesirable outcomes that are defined as undemocratic. In my opinion this also holds true for the far right itself – excluding the influence lacking fascist minority (Davidson 2015; Renton 2019, 2020; Saull 2015) (see footnote for further elaboration and explanation of my position¹⁸). The latter claims to resolve

¹⁸I am aware that my position may seem contentious, particularly as I do not offer a strict definition of fascism here. First, it is crucial to differentiate fascism from other far-right tendencies. Historically, the far right cannot be seen as an inevitable progression toward fascism (Paxton 2004). This oversimplified "slippery slope" theory diminishes the unique dangers posed by fascism, particularly the horrific singularity of the Holocaust. Moreover, the idea that fascism always culminates in an extreme, antisemitic form like Hitler’s regime risks trivializing the specificity of the Holocaust.

The emergence of fascism in contemporary liberal democracies is highly improbable, even under historical conditions that once favored its rise as a radical, violent counter-revolutionary movement (Paxton 2004). Consider some key factors that fostered the growth of fascism in the 20th century: rampant chauvinistic imperialism, militarized societies shaped by unprecedented carnage during World War I, a revolutionary proletariat, the Russian Revolution, and significant geopolitical and economic turmoil, such as the Great Depression and hyperinflation (Pätzold 2013; Pätzold and Weissbecker 2009; Paxton 2004; Renton 2020; Weißbecker 2020). None of these conditions exist in a form comparable to that time. Despite these conditions, fascism only rose to power in two cases from *within a non-fascist* nation-state: Germany and Italy (Payne 1996).

Fascism is also not a monolithic phenomenon; its different movements can conflict with each other. The conservative right has historically opposed fascist movements, often seeing them as threats rather than allies (Paxton 2004). Furthermore, the relationship between capital, fascism, and the far right is inherently

the crisis not by limiting but by doing away of liberal democracy to replace its institutions with the expansion of the authoritarian state.

As a first step it is important to recognize that these crisis-definitions embody claims of social groups and social movements for the ownership of social problems, that are articulated in reified form and often addressed by claiming a superior moral standpoint (Gusfield 1989). In this process social problems are presented as solvable if the 'right' political approach is chosen. This disguises what Rittel and Webber (1973) called the wicked nature of social problems, meaning that they can't be solved objectively but are subject to the contingency of the societal process that transforms them.

It is crucial to understand that all such claims have so far failed to realize their promises to resolve the problems of capitalism (see chapter two and four). This failure has led to the generalization of a rather pessimistic account of subjectivity that is deemed incapable to bring about freedom and therefore needs to be ruled in one way or another. This represents a dominant aspect of the prevailing political culture encompassing the whole political spectrum. By example of the mental health industry Ashley Frawley (2024) illustrates this

contradictory. Fascism does not simply serve the needs of capital; rather, it embodies contradictory tendencies within capitalism that require specific historical conditions to become relevant (Davidson 2015). Fascism does not merely express the needs of capital; instead, put simply, it embodies contradictory tendencies within capital that require specific circumstances to become relevant (Pätzold 2013).

It is essential to recognize that many diagnoses of fascism made by the left, particularly since the rise of the New Left, have often been inaccurate (Passmore 2014). Therefore, I argue for rejecting the tendency to label every authoritarian development and reactionary movement as fascism. This tendency is rooted in the New Left and the prevailing political culture that emerged with it. It is based on the premise that social movements claim ownership of socially constructed problems from a moral standpoint (Gusfield 1989). This has led to an overuse of the term 'fascism,' which, as Palmiro Togliatti pointed out, risks reducing it to a catch-all for any authoritarian or reactionary development. He criticized this during the interwar years, stating that labeling every instance of political repression as fascism does little to clarify the actual nature of the threat: "If someone thinks it is reasonable to use the term 'fascism' to designate every form of reaction, so be it. But I do not see the advantage we gain, except perhaps an agitational one. The actuality is something different. Fascism is a particular, specific type of reaction" (Togliatti in Renton 2020).

It might not be an exaggeration to say that the left had its best political understanding of fascism during the interwar period, as seen in the analyses of Marxists from that era (Renton 2020). However, this understanding is now mostly forgotten, deliberately misunderstood, or even considered reactionary (Pätzold 2013:26–58, 2015; Weißbecker 2020:406–19). Fascism needs to be defined clearly in terms of its specific practices and theories, which embody a historical horizon for transforming society. Idealistic trends that obsessively reduce political practice to language and discourse should be firmly rejected as reductionist (Renton 2001).

In my assessment of the current political landscape, I align with antifascist historian David Renton, who argues that the fascist elements within the modern far right remain marginal and have not (yet) significantly capitalized on the broader success of far-right politics – however, they might (Renton 2019, 2024). The antifascist stance I support is rooted in opposing fascist elements specifically, as they close off emancipatory possibilities. Mislabeling non-fascist far-right movements as fascist is counterproductive and can inadvertently strengthen actual fascist movements (Renton 2019). In this light, 'negative' antifascist tactics should be reserved for genuine fascist threats, while 'positive' emancipatory politics should be the primary means of countering the broader far-right. Appeals to state power or restrictions on free speech, including hate speech laws, should be avoided by the left (Renton 2021, 2022). While there may be complex situations where opposing such laws is challenging, the left should remain committed to opposing restrictions on civil liberties, such as free speech, and focus on creating a cultural space for open debate. Criticism should be rooted in emancipatory practice rather than moralistic or paternalistic judgments (Renton 2021).

strain of the prevailing political culture. She argues that such failed claims narrate “a society stuck between what *is* and what *ought to be*. That is, the gap between the promises of the modern world and the world *as it is* has come to seem like an unbridgeable chasm. The persistent inability to move beyond some of the most wicked issues of the present has led to their gradual naturalization and relocation within the human soul [...]. However, [...] the problems promised finally to be solved are still there. As they persist so too does the underlying story which places human subjectivity at the centre of a system of social problems. [...] The conclusion is [...] ‘human subjectivity is far weaker than we imagined’” (Frawley 2024:3). Such pessimistic accounts of subjectivity that habituate a society stuck in an everlasting present between what is and what ought to be express the alienated political culture. This is crucial to be kept in mind to understand the problem-formation in the therapeutic process.

To establish the deeper foundation for my argument on why and how therapists can and should move beyond the prevailing political culture when confronted with right-wing clients, I want to briefly describe the unique situation therapists find themselves in. From this starting point, I aim to develop the inherent contradictions that hold epistemological value for my argument (for the concept “epistemological value of contradiction” see f.e. Højholt and Kousholt 2020; Ollman 2015).

The discussion will outline the subjective processes that shape therapists' responses to encounters with right-wing clients, situating these processes within a cultural and historical perspective. With appropriate concepts, these subjective responses can become valuable meaning-making resources for overcoming the immediacy of the prevailing culture. It is crucial to distinguish the suggested concept of meaning-making from discourse, as it encompasses subjective processes involving emotional, conceptual, and symbolic aspects that constitute motivational systems (González Rey 2018a). While this may seem similar to psychoanalytic conceptions of meaning, the differences are significant (González Rey 2019c, 2019d). The suggested concepts – liminality, fabulation, and historical prototypes – are only preliminary. Developing an adequate framework for describing these subjective processes requires advancing these concepts through a substantial discussion of the theory of subjectivity and theoretical psychology more generally (González Rey 2017; González Rey, Mitjans Martínez, et al. 2017; González Rey 2018a, 2019a, 2019c, 2019d, 2019b, 2019b; Teo 2018). An explicit discussion of theorizing subjective processes is crucial to overcoming the limits of culturally prevailing conceptions, such as psychoanalytic theories.

Let's begin by considering that therapists are continually confronted with the historical and cultural boundary of what is considered sane and what is deemed insane/mad (Dörner 1969; Foucault 1969). Regardless of their therapeutic orientation, therapists must engage in a collaborative meaning-making process, drawing on frameworks of meaning that help clients navigate this boundary to live more meaningful lives and overcome constraints (Richards and Stenner 2022:193f). Whether this 'help' is genuinely emancipatory or a form of social control, these “frameworks of meaning which Psychology and its clients

jointly supply are [...] part and parcel of the cultural process by which that boundary is continually revised and the meaning of madness itself constantly reformulated” (Richards and Stenner 2022:197).

As Helmut Dahmer elaborates with the case of psychoanalysis, this places emancipatory psychotherapeutic practice in a peculiar position. Initially, it must disguise itself in a scientific language to claim ownership of life problems that appear reified and medicalized as mental illness or in other forms that individualize life problems. “Why? Because it must take the pseudo-natural status of its 'objects' (patients, clients) seriously until they are able to extricate themselves from it” (Dahmer 2001:31–42, 2012). It is worth noting here, though I will elaborate later, that within this reification lie contradictions that harbor the potential to overcome the prevailing political culture. I will address this later as a historical problem to cultivate meta-motivation.

3.1. Liminality

To advance my argument, I suggest that situations within therapy where the process of meaning-making revises naturalized meanings, or those co-created by these processes, can be considered liminal. Paul Stenner (2017:62) explains liminality as “the ‘betwixt and between’ condition of being *in the process of crossing a threshold* (i.e. of becoming). Gennep’s concept of liminality was developed to understand the rituals of the small-scale societies traditionally studied by anthropologists, but Victor Turner (1969), Arpad Szokolczai (2009) and others have extended its use to modern societies and also to the kinds of spontaneous (as distinct from ritualized) liminal experiences [...]. Any situation involving the removal or erasure of the usual limits that organize life (providing recognizable social identities and positions with allocated rights and responsibilities, etc.) can be considered liminal (Thomassen 2014)”. Therefore, the process of the revision of meaning in therapy is, on a more general level, not that different from other cultural meaning-revising processes, like the historical experience of tragedy in art (Stenner and Zittoun 2021). The concept of catharsis directly illustrates this parallel.

While the experience of liminality as a process of becoming primarily pertains to the client in therapy, it would be incorrect to assume that therapists remain unchanged throughout this process. Therapists inevitably develop their practice in conjunction with the client’s liminal experiences. This is particularly evident when considering supervision and similar social practices as rituals ingrained in therapy culture, designed as liminal spaces to help therapists learn from and overcome challenging experiences. These situations not only offer therapists their own liminal spaces but also highlight that the motivation to participate in such practices can be triggered by a liminal experience in therapy. This fits Stenner’s description of liminal experiences as a temporary suspension of limits with the potential to transition to a different set of limits, marking the emergence of novelty (Stenner 2021).

When therapists encounter clients with far-right political orientations, reflections on underlying cultural processes can emerge. While therapists may often be unconscious of their roles as both subjects and objects within these processes – particularly since their profession relies on the existence of 'troubled person industries' – the meaning-making processes specific to therapy culture are likely to fail in providing convincing meanings for encounters with right-wing orientations. The lack of orientation tools (*Orientierungsmittel*) and offers (*Orientierungsangebote*) within therapy culture creates problems for therapists in developing an orientation capable of navigating such encounters. This is especially true since conscious reflection on broader cultural and societal processes is unlikely. Before describing the subjective processes likely to emerge instead of conscious reflection, I will specify such encounters in more detail.

Firstly, such encounters can manifest as conflicts among therapists, their clients, and co-workers over whether the right-wing orientation is pathological – in the traditional sense of the concept. This can draw attention to the historical revision of the sanity-insanity boundary. More importantly, these encounters can lead to a crisis where prevailing meaning-making processes are temporarily suspended. This can occur in moments when clients disclose their far-right orientation to therapists, or when therapists are suddenly struck by the realization that their client might belong to the far right. It can also happen when therapists seek self-clarification and support from colleagues, only to discover in a sudden turn of events that their colleagues may themselves hold far-right or 'anti-democratic' views. Such scenarios can motivate therapists to actively participate in social practices within the therapy culture, such as intervision, supervision, or informal collegial counseling, to gain a better understanding of their clients' political orientations. Alternatively, they may seek this understanding outside the established therapeutic culture.

3.2. Fabulation

While such scenarios include moments of crisis and accompanying liminal experiences that suspend prevailing meaning-making processes therapists, that encounter such scenarios, might rarely consciously reflect on the underlying cultural processes, but, and that is more important, they must engage in reimagining political culture in order to orientate themselves. Such engagement can be theorized with Stenner as fabulation. Fabulation conceptualized “*as the passage* from disturbing event to creative intuition. This passage need not lead to a creative advancement, but might get blocked in a purely destructive phase, in conservatism, or in an unproductive paralysis” (Stenner 2017:61). Fabulation is a myth-making capacity that engages with the world on imaginative grounds, that precedes conceptual understanding. Before “we can accurately describe the world, we must imaginatively construct it, and become an active part of it. [...] Fabulation points to this affectively charged process of construction that necessarily precedes the more abstract and intellectual business of concept formation and abstract thought. Fabulation, from this perspective, is less a

question of misrepresenting a pre-existent world of facts, and more a question of gaining imaginative access to a world that ever exceeds us, but that we are already in some sense a part of” (Stenner 2017:39f).

Another aspect of fabulation is crucial here. That pertains the fabulation of a collective. In this way, Fabulation “is tied to a necessary project of creating ourselves, both individually and collectively: a project of self-formation through culture. Any human collective necessarily involves a fabulation of sorts” (Stenner 2017:40). I find Stenner’s understanding of fabulations helpful because it conveys the power of imaginative practices to engage individuals into collective projects. Considering my outline of the prevailing political culture so far how fabulations might recruit oneself, colleagues or clients into the defence of ‘democracy’, including convincing oneself of the necessity of such a defence and thereby chaining one’s imagination to the immediacy of the pessimistic and alienated horizon of the dominant political imagination of the present. Therefore, “to fabulate a collective is not merely to imagine a people, but to invent an idea powerful enough to *collect* one. This always also means: powerful enough to undo the principle that had collected them to date” (Stenner 2017:66).

In other words, fabulation in the context of such scenarios as described above allows to engage with subjective processes that are not simply reproducing dominant political orientations but rather subjectively configuring the reimagination and recreation of political culture (for the concept of subjective configurations: González Rey 2017; González Rey, Mitjans Martínez, et al. 2017). While this does not mean to move beyond the prevailing political culture, engaging with such subjective processes is a starting point, since they are related to liminal moments that are generative. Nissen notes: Liminality in regard to fabulation does “not merely point to the situation of being in-between but also to the cultural formation of this situation and of the hopes of becoming that it harbored and (thus) to the artifacts with which this formation was accomplished [...] and on why fabulation, the creation of model artifacts, is more than simply true or false replicas of a given situation” (Nissen 2023:149).

To further clarify the task of moving beyond the immediacy of the prevailing political culture, it is essential to note that fabulation is intrinsically connected to the concept of utopia. Fabulation occupies the middle ground between abstract utopia, which can be understood as blueprints for how society should be, and concrete utopia, which serves as a negation of the present (Kołakowski 1969). The latter embodies a future-oriented surplus of not-yet-realized emancipatory tendencies embedded in the societal process, capable of overcoming the immediacy of prevailing political culture (Bloch 1959; Marvakis 2006, 2007). Compared to the conceptions of utopia, fabulation “points to a more messy, liminal and un-predetermined process of transformative passage. [...] The concept notably emerges from debates about the origins of religion and the sacred, pointing to a zone of indiscernability between the aesthetic and the sacred (see Stenner, 2017b). A moment’s reflection shows that we have wandered into territory that is a profoundly transdisciplinary mixture of art, politics, religion, psychology, philosophy, anthropology and, [...] historical sociology” (Stenner 2018:179).

What can't be pursued here is that the zone of indiscernability between the aesthetic and the sacred holds important implications pertaining the advancement of the study of the interplay of subjective processes and cultural representation of the fascist far right. However, the next section will draw on historical and sociological studies that have investigated this topic regarding how invocations of the cultural representations of the fascist far right after the world war II are used to foster political legitimacy and how those practices transform national remembrance culture; the usage of the collective memory of the holocaust to legitimize authoritarian measures; and the reconfiguration of the political legitimization of American imperialism post 9/11 (Bond 2015; Herz 1996, 1997; Herz and Schwab-Trapp 1997; Schwab-Trapp 2002, 2007; Segev 2000).

3.3. Fabulation and Political Orientation

To advance my argument, it is crucial to examine the content that fabulation, as a myth-making capacity, might produce in scenarios where therapists encounter far-right political orientations in their workplace. This examination requires connecting the concept of fabulation with my depiction of political orientations as historical theory-practice relations. When considering the explanations, I have developed so far, it becomes clear that therapists are both the objects and subjects of these historical theory-practice relations. However, it would be an overstatement to suggest that therapists possess a conscious theoretical account of the societal arrangement of their everyday lives. Instead, through their political orientation, they produce a vision of society that can be better understood as myth-making. Contrary to popular opinion, this myth-making is quite similar to the societal theories developed by social scientists, who themselves are not outside historical theory-practice relations (Marvakis 1996:65–78).

While the claim that social science itself is a social problem is overly simplistic and fails to address the reification of societal relations as mere social problems, such claims can nonetheless highlight the effects of social scientists' efforts to address issues within capitalism (Best 2003). For instance, Christensen (2013) illustrates how public sociology creates visions of society as quasi-mythical plights populated by villains and saviors, to whom motives and desires are ascribed, thereby outlining paths to progress and presenting the framework of public sociology as the remedy. Considering this, I believe it is justified to claim that social scientists are not necessarily more or less conscious than therapists of the societal arrangement of their everyday lives, because, in the end, their job is to integrate progressive developments into the welfare state (Marvakis in press).

The existence of the welfare state, both in the West and in the former Eastern Bloc, relies on a state-managed capitalist economy—originally in the form of Fordism and now in the form of neoliberalism. Even when attempts to integrate progressive developments into the welfare state are successful (Pollock 1941), they remain perilously insecure and constantly vulnerable to attacks aimed at saving the system from the threat of crisis, whether the crisis is real or politically manufactured (Marvakis et al. 2016). Therefore, the development of

the welfare state can be seen as the failure of revolutionary alternatives. This failure has fundamentally shaped the world we live in, yet social sciences struggle to grasp its full meaning. Like therapy, social science is situated in a world stuck between what is and what ought to be. In the wake of the failure of historical theory-practice relations, only fabulation (not theory) remains to bridge this chasm: “Sociological and psychological concepts are too superficial to express what has happened to revolutionaries [... in those] decades: their will toward freedom has been damaged, without which neither understanding nor solidarity nor a correct relation between leader and group is conceivable” (Horkheimer 1942).

3.4. The Naturalization of Politics within the Prevailing Political Culture

Having established the connection between political orientation and fabulation, my argument must take an intermediate step before exploring the contents of fabulation that might emerge when therapists are confronted with far-right orientations. This is necessary because fabulation, as a myth-making capacity, must draw from the meaning-making resources of the prevailing political culture. To explain this, we must first delve deeper into the political culture before returning to the practice of fabulation.

Given the context of this political culture, as previously outlined, the fabulation will inevitably contain reifications. Political orientations, understood as historical theory-practice relations, are reified within the prevailing horizon for societal transformation, limiting possible means of political change to a specific set of practices. For example, this naturalization can be understood through the established distinction in political science between politics, polity, and policies. This distinction emerged and became prominent through the work of influential scholars like Max Weber (1905, 1921), David Easton (1956), Talcott Parsons (1937, 1950), Harold Lasswell (1950, 1963), Gabriel Almond and Bingham Powell (1966)

The distinction defines politics as the overall process of governance, including decision-making, conflict resolution, and the struggle for power and influence that is driven by different political ideologies. Polity: The constitutional structures, legal systems, and forms of government that shape the institutional framework within which political processes occur. This is also understood as the ‘the body’ of politics as the institutional framework within which political processes and activities take place. Policies: The principles or courses of action adopted or proposed by governments, addressing specific issues through laws, regulations, and programs, like healthcare and economic policies.

Using this framework, we understand how certain forms of politics, such as liberal democracy, are institutionalized as the most rational and desirable way of doing politics, while other conceptions like one-party dictatorships, paramilitary rule, or absolute monarchies are outlawed. This perspective, however, is not sufficient to understand the naturalization of politics and why far-right orientations are represented as anti-democratic and irrational. To grasp this fully,

we must revisit the conception of political orientations as historical theory-practice relations.

The cultural representation of liberal democracy suggests that a system deemed most desirable and rational would only be rejected for irrational reasons. While this perspective is not entirely incorrect, it presupposes a reified way of conceptualizing politics and the far-right. It implies that undesirable outcomes of the system are independent of its inherent value and must ultimately be external to what is considered proper or real democracy. Consequently, undesirable outcomes are often explained paternalistic by demagoguery, corruption, or the confused subjectivity of those who have not (yet) 'seen the light'.

This perspective frequently leads to the development of measures to control such undesirable outcomes, justified by references like the paradox of tolerance (Popper 1945). These means of social control or biopolitics employ psychological technologies and have significantly influenced the development of psychology as an academic discipline. This influence is exemplified by Harold Lasswell's (1948) influential model of communication, developed through his studies of propaganda and drawing on psychoanalytic resources (Lasswell 1927, 1935, 1949), exemplifies this influence. Lasswell, along with Walter Lippmann (1922) in his book "Public Opinion," argued that liberal democracy requires propaganda to function effectively. Lippmann further contended that public opinion should be controlled by an intellectual elite, echoing Tocqueville's and Burke's older pessimistic sentiments about the feasibility of mass emancipation, which they described as the tyranny of the masses (Landa 2009). Together, Lasswell's and Lippman's work suggests that institutions of liberal democracy dominate other political orientations. This candid account should not be surprising, considering that political science emerged as a project of the liberal allies who emerged victorious from the Second World War and had to reckon with the world system that developed afterward.

This perspective, however, understates the fact that liberal democracy is also a political form of heterodoxy, where some people dominate others through the state monopoly on violence. Justifications like the tolerance paradox overshadow the historical preconditions that make reified cultural representations of the far-right comprehensible. Categorizations of the far-right as irrational rely on an individualized understanding of political orientations, reducing them to personal attributes rather than historical relations of theory and practice. This view naturalizes political orientations to individual decision-making, as expressed in the idea of "one person, one vote," which presupposes the historical development of universal suffrage and the theory that political orientations can be quantified (Bourdieu 2001).

While the idea of "one person, one vote" might initially appear as a progressive call for universal suffrage, but the levelling of political judgment through its quantification can also seem problematic when considering that political thinking and judgment are not uniformly distributed. People's lives differ significantly, and not everyone has the same level of critical judgment about every aspect of society, often due to constraints imposed by their social position (Bourdieu 1982). The general comprehensibility of this idea presupposes

not only the quantifiable standardization of political opinions but also the production of the object of political opinions itself. This can be traced to a specific form of reification expressed in the development of mass politics in during the second half of the 19th century.

The political forms that emerged during this period are the historical preconditions for alienated political representation, which identifies individuals with political structures like parties, governments, policies or the body of politics as the state itself thereby cultivating authoritarianism. Howard Dick (2002) has referred to this as an anti-political crisis that is structurally rooted in modern politics. Such authoritarianism “claims that it incarnates the true realization of democracy when in fact it is the attempt to overcome the creative instability characteristic of democratic social relations typical of modernity” (Howard 2002:vii). Cutrone (Cutrone 2014b) extends this argument as “unmediated identification of politics with society, whether through the subordination of society or the liquidation of the party in the state - all in the name of quieting the inherent instability of politics, which society in its crisis of capitalism cannot afford”. This also marks the historical origin of the modern far-right (Saull 2015).

Ishay Landa (2019) explains that societal elites viewed the drive for mass emancipation and the emergence of mass society through industrial production as threats that needed to be contained. It is crucial to understand that it was not mass politics themselves but the dialectic between mass politics and the authoritarian response that created the historical conditions in which practices of alienated political representation originated, including the production of public opinion. The latter has since evolved into the business of manufacturing consent through public opinion production by market mechanisms and opinion polls, thereby providing numerous job opportunities for social scientists (Bourdieu 2001; Gusfield 1989).

Marx captured this historical constellation in his writings on the failed 1848 revolution and Louis Bonaparte's subsequent authoritarian rule, analyzing dialectically the emergence of the ‘bonapartist’ form of the modern authoritarian welfare state, later adopted by Bismarck. This model, featuring alienated forms of political representation, later became historically dominant, manifesting in various forms within liberal democracies, fascism, and Stalinism, thus integrating the masses into state-managed capitalism (Horkheimer 1942). Marx described how the emancipatory hopes of the exploited and oppressed masses get inevitably captured if they cannot lead and organize themselves politically: “They cannot represent themselves, they must be represented. Their representative must appear as their master, an authority over them, an unlimited governmental power protecting them from other classes” (Marx 1852:198f).

This reified historical form of politics, naturalized in prevailing political culture and tied to the development of the authoritarian welfare state, reduces democracy to established formal procedures like voting. Unwanted outcomes of these procedures, such as the success of far-right parties, must – in the absence of alternative conceptions of politics – appear in the prevailing political imagination as some kind of enigmatic almost mystic paradox. Democracy, reduced to a

voting procedure, is defined as the most desirable and rational system, sharing no similarities with far-right conceptions of politics, seen as irrational emotional appeals. If the naturalized horizon of this contradiction is not questioned, defenders of democracy may revise their democratic attitudes in authoritarian ways. In such a political imagination, other forms of collective self-determination that extend democracy beyond voting procedures will not only be overlooked but also appear anti-democratic.

This is crucial since the Marxist conception of politics, as class struggle, can explain the far-right's emergence without mystification by theorizing the problem of capitalism. Although class struggle remains landscape of the political imagination, its theory is confused and distorted. Class struggle is not culturally represented as a form of collective self-determination and potential to extend democracy but is seen one-sidedly as a means to improve living conditions rather than transcend the system entirely:

“The obsolescence of this second idea is merely a symptom of the fundamental change that has taken place since then: Class struggle has been transformed into a system of transactions between monopolistic entities, a means of class adjustment, and wars. Previously, the relationship between daily struggle and revolutionary goal determined the entire labor movement, at least in Continental Europe. Critical theory determined which path to take in each situation. However, the fighting class was not ‘integrated’ as just another competitor in the pursuit of surplus value. The party consciously did not concern itself with wage increases for its members or even the income, career, or social status of its leaders”, but aimed at fundamental social transformation (Horkheimer 1943).

3.5. Myth-making in Historical Prototypes and Crisis-definitions

With this context established, we can now turn to the content of the creative myth-making that therapists might engage in when confronted with far-right orientations. When discussing the fabulated content on a necessarily general level, I do not assume that the proposed elements of the content will be present in every encounter with the far-right or in every response of therapists to such political orientations. Rather, I believe this content will rarely be directly fabulated during such encounters, emerging more often in the aftermath when therapists try to make sense of what has happened. But this process can also occur during encounters, forming part of the response or reflection.

With this in mind, I am referring to a specific set of encounters which leave therapists at least momentarily troubled, unsettled or helpless, creating a need or wish to reflect, or share these experiences with someone supportive. Specifically, I am referring to those encounters and responses accompanied by some degree of discontent, malaise, confusion, disappointment, bewilderment, uncertainty, or anger, fear, or a sense of diminishing hope, or despair, or a more or less specific and lingering dissatisfaction with one's own responses to the encounter with far-right orientations that might even build up to feelings of shame, remorse, regret,

or the experience of personal failure. These subjective processes can evolve into problems that restricts therapists in their work, but they don't have to. I assume that what I describe as thefabulated content will also refer to instances where these subjective processes are a minor irritation in everyday working life, which therapists can mostly push aside and ignore but still feel the need or wish to discuss.

I understand the intentional engagement with such experiences as an opportunity for therapists because this engagement can serve as an entry point to historical self-clarification. This process is not only a prerequisite for addressing the task of moving beyond the prevailing political culture but also an opportunity to better understand how problems emerge in the therapeutic process and how to address them from an emancipatory standpoint. Our approach to this will always be influenced by our own political orientation, but we will rarely be aware of how history is expressed through our political orientation. Therefore, I consider such reflections valuable.

The content of fabulation will necessarily reflect how therapists and the collective they fabulate understand the problems of capitalism. This is because we inevitably situate our concerns with others' political orientations within the context of our times, drawing on the available meaning-making resources, including our explanations of how individuals come to adopt political orientations that we reject. Ultimately, we form an idea of the societal arrangement of everyday life for those whose political orientations we oppose. This is particularly pertinent for therapists, as their profession involves understanding and forming ideas about the social arrangement of their clients' lives (Dreier 2008, 2011, 2015).

Furthermore, such ideas are inherently – at least implicitly – included in our subjective explanations of political orientations that we reject. For instance, whether we believe that capitalism is characterized by contradictions that produce crises, or if we think crises are created by those who do not adhere to the correct norms. This understanding of capitalism's problems is closely linked to our concepts of emancipation: Do the crises of capitalism point beyond it in an emancipatory way? Must one morally combat capitalism? Does one see oneself as outside the capitalist relation? Is the expansion of the public sector within state-managed capitalism the road to socialism or not? Or do crises have nothing to do with capitalism, with emancipation running quite differently, for instance, through the advocacy of liberal values?

These questions are crucial for understanding the content of fabulation in the context of therapy, as they shape the way therapists conceptualize and respond to the political orientations of their clients. By examining these underlying assumptions and narratives, therapists can better navigate the complex dynamics of political orientations in their practice and contribute to a more nuanced and emancipatory therapeutic process.

Ultimately, and crucial for my argument, this engagement with reimagining political culture through fabulation includes historicizations and the rearticulation of historical prototypes (for the concept prototype see Nissen 2009, 2023; Nissen and Mørck 2019). These historical prototypes are used to assess the meaning of

political orientations that one rejects, thereby implicitly situating one's own standpoint within the broader societal context. Furthermore, historical prototypes are essential for developing generalized understandings in and through practices of political orientation. For instance, in a social situation we might reference the French Revolution or the Enlightenment (Davidson 2012) to categorize right-wing orientations as reactionary, regressive, anti-modern, counter-rationalist, or irrationalist, or to place them within the tradition of the Counter-Enlightenment. This doesn't need to be explicit. Simply categorizing someone who believes in conspiracy theories as rejecting scientific reasoning will today inevitably invoke such prototypes – even if only very implicitly. Practices of categorizing far-right orientations are embedded in a broader cultural web of meaning, that represents such practices as an answer to the transgression of 'sacred' political norms (by the far right) and therefore such practices are always situated in instructive and explanatory discourses that contextualize far-right orientations within dominant narratives about societal development (Herz 1993). Without this web, expressing a rejection of a political orientation with a simple label would not be possible.

This becomes evident when considering practices that compare the success of far-right parties today and the Nazi Party's rise to power in 1933 in Germany (Herz and Schwab-Trapp 1997). Such comparisons invoke explicitly historical prototypes. But these can be fabricated in various ways, thereby engaging with cultural knowledge to understand what is to be done in the current situation. Establishing a continuity between the present and 1933 by imagining 1933 as a seizure of power, will lead to different conclusions than 1933 as a crisis of the liberal Weimar Republic crushed by political extremes, or an instance where elites handed over power to the Nazis.

Fabricated responses to the far-right will necessarily convey an interpretation of the contemporary historical situation as a crisis. This can manifest by explicitly or implicitly invoking cultural representations of revolution or counter-revolution, the decline of progress, or themes of a threat either to the ruling order or that the ruling order or other social or political forces could endanger substantial areas of life if things continue without intervention. To explore crisis definitions as practices that reimagine the prevailing historicity of political culture, it is worthwhile to draw on Koselleck's (2002) conceptual history. He understands 'crisis' as a fundamental and irreplaceable precondition for articulating history in a culturally comprehensible manner. As such, crisis definitions are deeply ingrained in political culture. Despite his work representing a conservative interpretation of history, Koselleck provides a valuable starting point.

In what follows, I will revise his articulation of the concept by connecting it to my previous elaborations, thereby extending my discussion of historical prototypes. In the next section, I will ground the notion of crisis in the Marxist understanding of the problem of capitalism, providing a more comprehensive framework for understanding the implications of fabricated responses to far-right orientations. But first, let's consult some key quotes from Koselleck's conceptual history to establish a foundation for this analysis.

Derived from *krino*, to cut, to select, to decide, to judge; by extension, to measure, to quarrel, to fight "crisis" aimed at a definitive, irrevocable decision. The concept implied strict alternatives that permitted no further revision: success or failure, right or wrong, life or death, and finally, salvation or damnation [...]. Thus the concept potentially registered all the decision situations of inner and outer life, of individual humans and their communities. It was always a question of definitive alternatives about which an appropriate judgment had to be passed and whose alternative consummation was also determined by and in connection with the particular issues themselves (Koselleck 2002:237).

Koselleck emphasizes how the temporal dimension of the concept conveys a theory of time that transports knowledge about the right moment for action: "'Crisis' pointed toward the pressure of time, so to speak, which constituted the understanding of the sense of the concept. The knowledge of uncertainty and the compulsion toward foresight were part of almost every mention of crisis in order to prevent disaster or to search for salvation. In so doing, the particular temporal spans were delimited in varying ways according to the spheres of life thematized" (Koselleck 2002:238).

He argues that "'crisis' followed a career similar to that of 'revolution' or 'progress.' Both of the latter turned into temporal concepts, and their initial spatial or natural meaning dissipated with the Enlightenment as they became primarily historical concepts" (Koselleck 2002:239). Koselleck helps us understand how practices of crisis definitions became not only deeply rooted in modern political culture but also constantly reimagine modern political culture. He explains that "at least since the French Revolution, 'crisis' turned into a central" to make sense of "both political and social history. The same goes for the long-term Industrial Revolution, which was accompanied and influenced by a scientifically differentiated doctrine of crises and economic activity" (Koselleck 2002:239). But the prominent location of "crisis" in the reimagination of modern political culture and revolutions does not alone exhaust its historical significance. At least of similar importance is the capability of crisis as an interpretative category to make the claim that "that the entire course of history can be interpreted out of its diagnosis of time. Since then, it is always one's own particular time that is experienced as crisis. And reflection upon the particular temporal situation disposes one to both a knowledge of the entire past and a prognosis of the future" (Koselleck 2002:239).

As such, crisis definitions will always entail calls to action. By rearticulating the present situation as a crisis, they make sense of history by establishing a sense of historical continuity and discontinuity, thereby drawing on historical prototypes. Davidson's (2012) work explains how bourgeois revolutions became models to make sense of history for subsequent generations of not only radicals but also counter-revolutionaries, less radical reactionaries, and conservatives alike. Encompassing the connection of historical prototypes (that is, cultural memories of successful and failed bourgeois revolutions) with crisis definitions, the model of bourgeois revolution establishes an experience of historical time that provides knowledge for political action by outlining the trajectory of history as being both determined by political opponents or other

non-controllable factors and as being contingent, thereby indicating moments suitable for political intervention.

Even though these elaborations refer to world history, the described political imagination as embedded in modern culture is significant for individuals making sense of unwanted political developments. A simple encounter with far-right propaganda on the way to work or more drastically, encountering a swastika graffiti in public space, will inevitably engage individuals in the reimagination of history. Categorizing political advertisements and symbols as far-right propaganda, rather than simply seeing them as election posters or graffiti, inherently invokes historical prototypes. Therefore, individuals don't need specific or elaborate knowledge about historical events, nor do they have to refer to them explicitly to make sense of their present historical situation, as resources or means for orientation are already deeply embedded in the political culture that permeates everyday life.

Stenner (2022) has argued, using the example of the COVID-19 pandemic, that experiencing an event as a crisis disrupts the continuous chronological experience of time, where time is measured and quantifiable, representing all units of time (hours, days, etc.) as identical. Such encounters, he explains, can "generate *liminal experiences* by disrupting and re-ordering expectations of the future, reconfiguring memories of the past, and thereby transforming the very seat of reality: the present" (Stenner 2022:77). Therefore, the "temporal dimensions of liminality" help understand the experience of crises "as a 'between worlds' phase of becoming inherently in process as both a 'no longer what it was' and a 'not yet what it will be'" (Stenner 2022:80). I argue that this experience of a 'between worlds' phase of becoming necessitates subjective engagement in the reimagination of political culture to reestablish a sense of historical continuity. Fabulations play a key role in this process. This does not mean that such experiences of crisis are short-lived or that fabulations will resolve these conditions; rather, these experiences of a 'between worlds' phase of becoming are permanently present and recur in everyday life, much like memories. This ongoing process urges fabulation to come to terms with these experiences.

For fabulations to establish a sense of historicity as continuity and discontinuity, they must convey the interconnection of individual life and historical trajectories as temporal experiences through narrative practices that draw from wider cultural repertoires, narrative models of life, and temporality (Brockmeier 2002, 2015, 2022). It is crucial to not understand such fabulations as attempts of an individual trying to cope with societal developments. This would convey a false dichotomy between individual life and the societal process. Subjects are not separate from but active participants in society. Instead, to fabulate one's own historical situation as a situation being in crisis illustrates how individual and collective memory are intertwined and never separate.

Even when historical prototypes are not explicitly depicted in fabulations that reimagining the present as crisis, merely invoking indirectly a historical event within a narrative structure – that is to remember and select – means participating in the collective reimagination of cultural memory and its historicity (Assmann 1998). Cultural memory is neither a singular stable object nor can it be

dichotomously conceptualized as individual versus collective or cultural memory (Brockmeier 2002; Halbwachs 1992; Wertsch 2002, 2009). Rather, memories are best understood through the cultural practices of remembering and forgetting themselves as “transindividual or collective phenomena, cultural creations like myths, legends, and other stories that reverberate in the minds of generations. They do not necessarily have to be mental but can also be material and social artifacts, objectified in landscapes, monuments, museums, libraries, computers, rituals, calendars, anniversaries, and other structures and collective practices” (Brockmeier 2010:6). These artifacts can serve as indirect means to invoke historical prototypes to understand and convey interpretations of the contemporary historical situation because, “typically, such material structures of cultural memory are embedded in contexts of explanatory and interpretive discourse” (Brockmeier 2010:6).

Thus, the articulation of historical prototypes in the context of crisis definitions can objectify, convey, generate, and transform generalized understandings. These understandings can serve as means or resources in political orientation (as a practice) to either move beyond the prevailing political culture or limit historical consciousness to the immediacy of the dominant political culture's historicity. The subjective framing of historical prototypes in practices of remembering and forgetting is crucial. It is always a creative process that reimagines political culture but is never independent of the prevailing political culture. Such processes presuppose and rearticulate historical theory-practice relations. I will explain this in more detail, as it challenges established myths within the prevailing political culture. For now, I want to point out that understanding the invocation of historical prototypes in the context of crisis definitions as practices of forgetting and remembering of memories as transindividual phenomena, and considering that those practices are situated in the everyday conduct of life, can help us deepen our understanding of the subjective processes involved in the fabulation of a collective and how such processes can capture individuals to engage in political projects.

It's important to note that historical prototypes are necessary preconditions to make causal claims of crisis definitions intelligible. Crisis definitions call historical discontinuity to attention by reimagining events as watershed moments or historical turning points in societal development. For these narratives of historical discontinuity to be intelligible to subjects, they must draw on memories of historical watershed moments as prototypes to understand the claim for discontinuity. For instance, when a historical situation or event is narrated as a crisis of something valued, such crisis definitions must at least implicitly invoke cultural memories of progress or civilizational regression for the historical trajectory that the narrative conveys to be comprehensible.

3.6. Crisis-definitions and Causal Thinking in the Culture of Despair

I argue for carefully observing the real political effects of crisis claims, as calls for a state of emergency are not necessarily conducive to emancipatory politics.

It is crucial to understand how the interplay of causal thinking, crisis definitions, and historical prototypes fosters a political imagination steeped in despair, where far-right claims for a state of emergency appear more convincing.

Causal thinking emerged as a widespread practice to influence public opinion with the transformation of the public sphere, turning attention into a valuable resource, historically through the evolution of advertising and more recently through social media (McCombs and Valenzuela 2021). Causal thinking is conveyed through narratives that shift conflictual societal situations from the realm of fate to human agency (Stone 1989). This process, operating within a framework of cause and effect, transforms discontents, suffering, and grievances into social problems that appear resolvable if the right remedy is chosen and implemented by the right people. This is a process of reification because, for claim makers to appear capable of providing remedies, they must frame problems within the limits of their agency (Frawley 2024).

These practices contribute to constraining and alienating political imagination, reducing politics to a domain best left to experts and separating it from the economy, which is seen as a sphere governed by natural laws outside direct democratic control, manageable only by cunning politicians, economic experts, and successful capitalists (Mattei 2022). The alienated experience of politics is validated by a general reified consciousness of history and society that a hallmark of capitalism. The resulting fragmentation, Lukács (1923) argues, manifests in consciousness as a separation of different spheres of life: economics, politics, and culture.

In politics, causal thinking is neither inherently right nor wrong but contingent, primarily serving the purpose of competing over resources within state-managed capitalism. Claim makers often obscure the societal situation they address to compete for scarce media attention, needing powerful, dramatic, and simplifying narratives that promise more competitive solutions compared to other claims (Hilgartner and Bosk 1988). Claims compete within a “culture of vulnerability” deeply influenced by psychological theories and discourses (Frawley 2024), where appeals to “sensitivity to harm and responsiveness to the harmed” (Haslam 2016:13) receive attention and recognition. In this competitive environment, claims must appeal to authorities for recognition, often inflating harm to gain attention. This creates opportunities for authorities to introduce authoritarian measures in the name of security and harm prevention, which can cause harm themselves. This makes causal thinking prone to confusing cause and effect because claims must prioritize effective rhetoric that draws on the themes of raising awareness and harm reduction, fitting established narratives (Frawley 2024). To be instantly convincing, these narratives inevitably align with the immediacy of the prevailing political culture, which promotes reified and pessimistic views about the emancipatory potential of subjectivity (Frawley 2024). As such, causal thinking is a widespread phenomenon shaping political imagination, capable of capturing even emancipatory political intentions.

In the context of climate change and migration, Calum Nicholson (2014) demonstrates how crisis definitions use causal thinking, fabulating climate change as tipping points and crossroads to dramatize the plight and intensify

despair, urging people to act quickly. This approach reimagines the prevailing political culture but ultimately fails to lead to relevant emancipatory conclusions. Similarly, fabulating the problem of the far-right as a crisis of discrimination, inequality, and violence that needs addressing to avoid further escalation often employs causal thinking. This not only oversimplifies complex societal issues but also risks perpetuating a sense of urgency that may stifle thoughtful and effective emancipatory actions. This highlights the importance of scrutinizing how crisis narratives are constructed and the potential consequences they carry for both understanding and addressing social problems.

It is important to clarify that I do not claim such accounts are inherently wrong. Right-wing violence and discrimination have indeed risen. Historically, the far-right has always driven discrimination. However, we now observe a situation in which the Left, often unintentionally, promotes discriminatory accounts when responding to far-right violence with the intention of combating racism, antisemitism, misogyny, or transphobia. This can be illustrated by the Left's attempts to make sense of recent events such as the Hamas-led attack on October 7th, 2023, and the subsequent military response by the Israeli right-wing government, or the Ukraine war. Another example is the Left's reaction to authoritarian state measures during the COVID-19 pandemic, which restricted freedom of assembly and delegitimized protests against those measures without addressing the content of the protests. But the question of how this contradiction emerged historically, where the Left acts against its own declared goals, and how it should be addressed can be answered in various ways, are ultimately depending on the political orientation employed. What follows is a preliminary investigation of the contradiction, which I will extend in the section following the discussion of the problem of capitalism.

However, causal thinking obscures this contradiction, posing the danger of replacing argumentation and historical self-clarification with a sense of emergency that necessitates immediate action. Such thinking quantifies incidents of right-wing motivated violence within a narrative of ever-increasing inequality and discrimination without explicitly developing historical prototypes. The fabricated historical trajectory implicitly relies on prevailing historical prototypes to create a vision of societal derailment into barbarism. This approach, metaphorically speaking, remains unconscious of history, thus forfeiting the opportunity to reengage with history to build consciousness. Lacking such self-clarification, causal thinking can only employ abstract, often undefined terms like society or democracy, which prevailing political culture interprets within a nationalistic framework as collective objects of care that must be defended. This calls for affiliation with the 'good' camp and fighting the 'bad' one, which makes it impossible to understand contradictory developments and dynamics. It replaces theoretical efforts to understand political orientations as historically changing relation of theory and practice with identities. Such accounts do not provide the historical self-clarification needed for emancipatory politics. Instead, they create confusion and despair, contributing to a political culture in which crisis accounts of the far right appear more credible.

The contradiction where emancipatory-intended politics inadvertently foreclose emancipatory potentials can be observed in the paradoxical effect of practices like awareness-raising to mobilize support against discrimination and the far-right by influencing public opinion. To highlight social exclusion and violence as effects of discrimination and far-right politics, the Left commonly employs rhetoric emphasizing harm and sensitivity to harm. These are prime pathways for influencing public opinion and resonate with the desire of the Left to give voice to marginalized people. Causal thinking portrays the far-right as progressing towards fascism unless countered by the policies and measures proposed by the Left as suitable remedies. As a result, the Left has been campaigning for authoritarian state measures like hate speech laws and advocating for corporations to use similar measures like deplatforming; appealing to domestic intelligence agencies to police and ban far-right organizations and call on municipalities to ban far-right assemblies, thereby supporting a conservative agenda (Renton 2021, 2022).

Furthermore, by using this strategy, the Left falls prey to the "semantic inflation of harm," which is seen as a core component of the culture of vulnerability. Haslam (2016) describes semantic inflation as the extension of psychological concepts that "focus on negative phenomena—social and personal harms such as abuse, addiction, bullying, mental disorder, prejudice, and trauma" (Haslam 2016, 13). Semantic inflation extends those concepts both horizontally, to capture qualitatively new phenomena, and vertically, to encompass less extreme phenomena. This extension dilutes the meaning of the concepts which has the contradictory effect of pathologizing and psychologizing everyday phenomena and also trivializing violence and suffering. This is significant because the Left articulates phenomena like racism, sexism, and the far-right often with reference to psychological concepts, and therefore we can observe an inflation of concepts of fascism and racism. This is exacerbated by the fact that the Left has a longstanding history of associating political orientations it rejects with fascism to create a stronger moral contrast with its agenda, thereby appearing more virtuous (Passmore 2014). This inflation might not contribute to awareness about such phenomena but rather lead to the dilution of their meaning, trivializing the associated violence.

Overall, the effects of the described constellation are the development of authoritarian state measures and the inflation of violence to the cultural experience of permanent threat in which makes authoritarian solutions appear as viable security measures to police those who are seen as perpetrators of harm. This legitimizes and generalizes political strategies that have been used traditionally by the political right and generates a sense of powerlessness on the Left which also contributes to the culture of despair.

Such fabricated visions of societal development, articulated through crisis definitions, obscure not only the dialectics of discrimination, inequality, the far-right, the Left, and other subjective moments in the societal process but also the meaning-making resources necessary to make these fabricated social myths convincing and intelligible. By implicitly drawing on historical prototypes that narrate the story of fascist development from the perspective of politically

insufficient antifascism, these narratives necessitate a revision of the aspirations of the 'old' Left while accepting 'just' wars. Consequently, these narratives position inequality and discrimination as central issues of concern, while creating a background experience of historical paralysis that fosters anxiety by portraying fascism as a force only stoppable by war. However, this approach fails to critically engage with the history of the revolutionary Left – specifically what they attempted but failed to achieve – and how this historic failure has impacted the subsequent political imagination of the Left. Consequently, it distorts the complex interplay of societal factors and limits the potential for a deeper, emancipatory understanding of social issues from a historical perspective.

I want to emphasize that these implicit historical prototypes do more than provide a vision of historical discontinuity by evoking cultural representations of barbarism; they also create a sense of historical continuity by drawing on historical conceptions of emancipation. While it is widely accepted that the bourgeois horizon of emancipation already employs the perspective of equality (Bobbio 1996), it may seem controversial today to claim that political criticism of inequality and discrimination that is a hallmark of the contemporary Left is not the 'natural' extension of the bourgeois revolutionaries of the 18th and early 19th century. The narrative that the 'modern' Left from the mid-19th century onwards has taken up these concepts as its natural heritage is not historically accurate. It represents a simplifying and distorting narrative of the history of the Left from a specific historical standpoint. Indeed, the use of these concepts for political criticism only appears as a largely undisputed marker of the Left within the political culture that emerged only after the failure of the historical revolutionary Marxism.

This shift in political culture was embraced by subsequent generations of the political Left. The emphasis on culture and subjectivity, and the relocation of the development of the emancipatory project into universities, was seen as political and theoretical progress that could finally do justice to the complexity and interrelatedness of different forms of oppression. In the view of the New Left, the old Left was incapable of this due to their theoretical and political limitations. Thus, the concept of emancipation as a project of liberation was replaced by the idea of emancipation as resistance against oppression and the just redistribution of wealth (Cutrone 2023).

Chapter 4: The Problem of Capitalism and Modern Politics

The historical Marxist and other sections of the revolutionary socialist Left were neither oblivious, ignorant, nor clueless about issues now categorized under 'discrimination,' 'exclusion,' and 'inequality.' They debated and theorized these topics through concepts like the 'Jewish question,' 'Women question,' and 'Negro question.' They situated these issues within the broader problem of capitalism, understanding this problem as a contradictory constellation that drives social and political conflicts. These contradictions were understood dialectically as not only reproducing and historically transforming these issues

but also simultaneously embodying historical possibilities for emancipation to overcome them. (Adi 2013; D'Emilio 1983; Frankel 1981; Michels 2011; Mitchell 1966; Notz 2020; Weigand 2002). Their engagement significantly shaped the political culture of the Left at that time. Even after the failure of the revolutionary Left, the title of Sartre's (1946) "Reflections on the Jewish Question" still reflects this historical context. Additionally, debates about revising the political orientation, that is the theory and practice of the revolutionary Marxists, and critically engaging with its history were part of the Marxist tradition, for example, under terms such as revisionism and orthodoxy, emphasising the important role of Karl Kautsky, Rosa Luxemburg and Lenin (Korsch 1923; Lukács 1923).

4.1. The Problem of Capitalism

The question of what historical Marxists understood as the problem of capitalism has sparked both internal Marxist debate and wider historical and political conflicts, leading to multiple interpretations. Given the complexity, this issue cannot be fully covered here. I will primarily present Chris Cutrone's interpretation, focusing on key aspects. I chose Cutrone's interpretation because it seeks to rediscover the political meaning of this problem through a critical interpretation of Marxism's history, rather than following the scholastic trend of interpreting Marx's *Capital*, which often results in sophistry and jargon-laden language that obscures more than it explains. Cutrone's approach does not claim to offer ready-made solutions in Marxism to be reapplied but acknowledges the difficulties that emancipatory politics face today. It's important to note that I did not invent this interpretation but aim to convey it clearly to enhance my overall argument. However, this interpretation should not be taken as final truth but scrutinized. Additionally, my discussion should not be seen as the final word but as an effort towards historical self-understanding.

I hope this selective discussion can contribute to developing a perspective capable of overcoming the repeating cycles of misery and despair. This belief stems from the idea that quick fixes or focusing on a set of political issues or values are insufficient. Instead, we must clarify how to interpret the problem of capitalism to understand *the* issue of politics within capitalism; how past attempts at solving the problem continue to shape both the character of capitalism and politics historically. Only such a historical perspective can overcome the immediacy of misery and despair, by grasping the interrelation of conflicting political orientations and the false necessity of opposing needs and social conflicts. Without this understanding, I believe it will be impossible to move beyond the cycles of self-destruction.

This presentation begins with a condensed depiction of some fundamental assumptions about the problem of capitalism. The following discussion will elaborate and explain the implications and meaning of these assumptions, using contrasts with more common interpretations of the problem of capitalism today to enhance understanding. The discussion will aim to clarify my suggested

understanding of political orientations and their interrelations as a problem of historically changing relations of theory and practice. This will provide, within a historical perspective, a clear understanding of emancipation and the far-right.

The concluding section of this part will connect these insights to the discussion of the problem of motivation and needs, suggesting a trajectory for engaging with the discussed issues within the context of therapy. In part three, I will further elaborate on this interpretation from a historical perspective, aiming to make it more comprehensible to a wider audience.

To set the stage for this presentation, it is crucial to highlight an important point: the “propaganda of working-class struggle politics by historical Marxism” has often been mistaken for its theoretical articulation of the problem of capitalism. This misrecognition has led to several confusions regarding the relationship between cause and effect in capitalism. Specifically, it has resulted in the misunderstanding of “the class division and conflict between workers and capitalists as the cause rather than the effect of capitalism and its inherent contradictions” (Cutrone 2021a). “Class inequality and hierarchy and its resulting relationships of exploitation is not the cause of the problem of capitalism, but, as Marxism properly recognized, the effect of capitalism” (Cutrone 2020b).

Given the confusion, it is important to clarify that capitalism is not simply greed or profiteering, nor is it merely exploitation. Those issues are recognized problems within our society. As Chris Cutrone (2020b) explains, “Capitalism is not a societal system or moral order or set of values — it is a crisis of the societal system, moral order, and set of values. The society we live in is bourgeois society. We live in bourgeois values and morality. Capitalism is the contradiction of that society and its values.” Thus, capitalism is not a society but a historical era, marked by this contradiction. Now, it is crucial to understand that this contradiction does not merely refer to the disparity between the normative ideals of bourgeois society and its reality. This perspective misses the core issue.

To grasp the issue, it is helpful to remember that Rosa Luxemburg (1913) referred to capitalism as ‘the wage system’. “This suggests the problem of capitalism that Marxism thought tasked socialism, namely, the crisis of capital accumulation that undermines and destroys the social value of wage labor” (Cutrone 2020b). For Marx this crisis resulted from “the contradiction of bourgeois social relations and industrial forces of production” (*ibid.*). This is a self-contradiction because industrial production is not external but internal to bourgeois society. Comprehending this self-contradiction both theoretically and practically constitutes the problem of capitalism, which began to emerge during the late 18th to early 19th century when the industrial revolution spread through Europe and the United States. The effect of this self-contradiction – and not its cause – “is the division of capital and labor” (*ibid.*), resulting in conflicting needs of capital and labor, such as profit versus human needs, including the needs of nature to regenerate and reproduce itself.

For Marx, capitalism was a ‘false necessity’. This means “not simply wrong necessity, but rather self-contradictory necessity. For the needs of capital and the needs of labor are the same” (Cutrone 2020a). It began as means to an end as increased productivity for greater liberty, but with needs “becoming opposed in

capitalism, there is the conflict of labor with itself as well as of capital with itself” (ibid.). Furthermore, from the division of capital and labor derive “the opposed classes of capitalists and workers” (Cutrone 2020a). The class struggle between capitalists and workers is not the cause but an effect of the self-contradiction of capitalism, resulting not only in conflicts between capitalists and workers but also among capitalists and among workers. The self-contradiction of capitalism “expresses labor’s contradiction with itself — which is also capital’s contradiction with itself” (ibid.).

Without going into the details of Marx’s thought, he distinguishes two different forms of productive capital: ‘variable and constant’ as well as ‘fixed and circulating’ capital. The first distinction refers to the creation and increase of value, the second to the physical and temporal aspects of capital turnover. Thus, capital is not a thing but a process involving several processes with specific demands and conditions for their reproduction. This is expressed in different temporal logics for their reproduction, which can come into contradictions and create crises. But this process is ultimately sustained through labor because capital and labor “are actually just two forms of capital [...] and both refer to labor” in its dual existence as a commodity or wage-labor and as human activity. Therefore, “Marx called capital ‘alienated labor’” (Cutrone 2020a). This underscores that both forms of capital, whether variable and constant, fixed and circulating, are ultimately embodiments of labor.

Marx also describes the distinction between capital and labor in temporal terms as the “domination of accumulated, past, [dead], reified labor over immediate, living labor is what first transforms accumulated labor into capital” (Marx 1849:409). This clarifies that capital is a process of domination in which past dead labor represents how capital dominates and directs labor as human activity, reversing means and ends: “The contradiction Marxism found in capitalism was that what began as a means to an end of societal production and wealth, capital, became an end in itself, and what was an end in itself, human life and activity, becomes a mere means to the ends of capital” (Cutrone 2021a).

Bourgeois Society

To untangle those phenomena, it is necessary to understand what is meant by bourgeois social relations and rights, since I stated that capitalism is the contradiction of bourgeois society and its values. To this end, it is helpful to recall the historical situation in which these phenomena emerged on the stage of world history. I keep my remarks brief here. See part three for a more detailed explanation. Through the bourgeois revolutions, especially the French Revolution, also termed the revolt of the third estate (Sieyès 1789), “it appeared that humanity attained its “natural” condition of Enlightenment, in relation both to the natural world and in humans’ relations with each other. Seemingly unlimited possibilities opened up, and the Dark Ages were finally brought to an end” (Cutrone 2010a). This meant that bourgeois society, which had developed within feudalism over several hundred years, found its political expression and

historical self-consciousness to state through the revolution the ‘truth’ of society as a society of free commodity producers that cooperated within free market exchange that wanted to liberate itself from feudal and clerical authorities. This resulted in the institutionalization of political and civil rights as a direct expression or implication of the declaration of human rights. The social and cultural bond that regulated human coexistence prior to the revolution was no longer understood as a natural or divine order, formerly expressed and codified in the language of religion, but as human-made, a product of human labor and cooperation. Consequently, the language of politics, history, and economy emerged, as well as the concept of society, to articulate the potential of humans to regulate their coexistence rationally and consciously, thereby becoming the subject (and no longer the object) that turns natural history into the history of humanity as the development of collective freedom, which was seen to be attainable only as a world society (Cubela 2023; Cutrone 2013a; Spencer 2013).

Thus, Enlightenment was not an era or epoch but a process in which society became conscious of itself and history. The social relations of bourgeois society and bourgeois rights were seen as expressing the principles necessary for the self-regulation of society to advance the process of Enlightenment towards universal freedom. For this to be possible, society was understood as a society of free property-owning commodity producers that developed societal wealth through free labor (not slavery or serfdom) and market exchange. Central to this, and also expressed in human rights, was the right to property grounded in the right of self-ownership. Self-ownership means that every human owns their labor power and the products produced through their labor (not the state, king, or church). In other words, labor time was established as the measure of wealth produced through societal cooperation and served as a regulatory principle for the appropriation and distribution of wealth, allowing individuals to participate in and transform society (not the position of the natural order into which they were born) to enable a historical trajectory of the free development of all.

Emergence of the Contradiction of Capitalism

With this in mind, we can now explain, how the contradiction between the industrial forces of production and bourgeois social relations has resulted in an ongoing “divergence and disparity between the value of capital and the value of wages” (Cutrone 2021a). In pre-industrial bourgeois society the value of the production of wealth was measure by the “value of labor, especially of labor-time” but this was still the measure of value of social production in capitalism (Cutrone 2020b). But unlike the pre-industrial era, were Adam Smith “observed that higher wages and lower profits increased productivity in society as a whole, after the Industrial Revolution, increased productivity was not due to workers’ greater efficiency but rather that of machines (Cutrone 2010a).

The increased productivity of machines “made not work but the workers superfluous” (Horkheimer 1942:293), resulting in mass unemployment as the process of proletarianization that created modern working class. “Marx and

Engels understood this unemployment [...as] a permanent feature of modern society after the Industrial Revolution, in which preserving the value of capital was in conflict with the value of workers' wages" (Cutrone 2010a). It is rooted in this conflict that "greater productivity increased not employment and wealth but rather unemployment and impoverishment, as capitalism destroyed traditional ways of life (for instance of the peasants) but failed to be able to provide meaningful productive employment and thus participation in society for all, as originally envisioned in the revolt of the Third Estate and promised in the bourgeois revolution against the hierarchy of the *ancien régime*." (Cutrone 2010a).

General Dynamic of Capitalism

The measure of value made obsolete by the industrial mode of production could not be replaced by the politically established self-regulating principles of bourgeois society. Society's productive capacities, what Marx termed the "general social intellect" – its potential for the production of societal wealth – have historically "outstripped the social and political rights of appropriation through living human labor by the working class" (Cutrone 2021a). The political failure to establish new regulatory principles adequate for industrial production resulted in the compulsion to preserve the value of capital, unleashing a crisis-ridden dynamic that dominates bourgeois society ever since.

The self-undermining and self-destructive nature of the disparity between "the general social intellect" and the diminishing value of human labor is expressed in two "increasingly divergent commodities produced by industry: goods for the subsistence of the working class; and surplus value for investment in production" – whether in wages or technology. This conflict between technology and human labor "characterizes capitalism on a societal scale" (Cutrone 2021a), manifesting the historical temporality that is typical of capitalism and expressed in "inflation, the necessity of interest in credit, and finance as the necessary form of speculation — namely, the claim of the past and present on the future — in investment in production" (Cutrone 2020b).

This leads to the constant increase in productivity, resulting in the cheapening of labor. The outcome is the cheapening of value. "But this cheapening threatens the value of investment and its speculation, hence the crisis of social value in capital. Attempts to preserve value in capital result in accumulation and concentration, producing a separate capitalist class of investors: they are capitalists in the sense of not merely owners of capital, but rather are the agents and servants of capital. Capital does not follow the dictates of the capitalists; but the capitalists follow the dictates of capital" (Cutrone 2020b).

Workers are compelled to support the "profitability of the capital that employs them, to preserve social investment in their work," (Cutrone 2021a) because their livelihood depends on it. Thus, the profitability of capital becomes essential for workers to reproduce themselves within capitalism, creating a cycle

where capital must constantly seek profit not as an end goal but as a means to sustain its value. “Marxism thus considered capitalism to be a general social compulsion to produce and preserve value in the form of capital to which all – everyone – in society are subject. In this sense, everyone in capitalism is a capital-ist, namely a follower of capital” (Cutrone 2020b). Consequently, disputes over the priorities of social investment in capital lead to conflicts not only among capitalists but also among workers, expressing “labor’s contradiction with itself — which is also capital’s contradiction with itself” (Cutrone 2020a).

The ordinary cheapening of value typically unfolds into crises when superfluous labor and superfluous money arise simultaneously. Labor cannot find employment, and money cannot find investment as capital. Crises result in “the destruction of existing concrete forms of production – the destruction of the concrete manifestations of capital – which means the depreciation of money and the unemployment, starving and perishing of the workers, the idling of machines and factories, the bankruptcy and dissolution of firms, etc.” (Cutrone 2020b).

Furthermore, the temporality of capital’s reproduction contradicts with the time needed for ecosystems to regenerate and human lives to reproduce. Capital’s need to sustain its value draws on human labor and ecosystems, which creates metabolic exchange problems due to conflicting temporal logics, such as climate change and the destruction of ecosystems (Fraser 2022). This metabolism between nature and society is not simply external exploitation but a historical process where labor shapes nature and vice versa. Fraser (2022) illustrates this with examples like the transformation of prairies into farmland, rainforests into mining and farming areas and the replacement of forests with tree plantations. The modern idea of nature as separate from society emerged with capitalism, expressed in the language of political economy, contrasting with earlier views that recognized the integrated metabolism of societal and natural reproduction, which was expressed in the language of religion (Cubela 2023).

When Marxists saw the self-contradiction of the social relations of labor represented in the condition of industrial production, they meant this in a very concrete sense. The recognition of the value of labor in the bourgeois concept of emancipation, through the right to property, was intended to ensure societal participation, leading to the development of freedom in a world society. But as Marx and Engels wrote in the ‘Communist Manifesto’, that capitalism itself “abolished – undermined and destroyed – private property, not only in the form of capital but also and most importantly in the form of labor: industrial production abolished the value of labor as a commodity. Nonetheless, this constant self-destruction of value was the occasion for its reconstitution and reproduction in different concrete forms after each crisis in value. In short, so long as there were starving workers desperate for employment, the social value of labor would be reconstituted — however, it was subject to self-destruction, restarting the cycle of capital accumulation again” (Cutrone 2020b). Thus, capitalism, rather than being a stable social system, is a contradiction of bourgeois social relations driven by industrial forces of production.

4.2. The Problem of Politics: The Bonapartist Dynamic and Class Struggle

Having established the Marxist conception of the problem of capitalism, I will now address some key issues related to the problem of politics in capitalism. To avoid misunderstandings, this section is not advocating for replacing therapy with class struggle. Rather, it reflects on political orientations and political culture by considering the Marxist vision of emancipation as the historical horizon of freedom – a vision largely absent from contemporary political culture. The aim of this discussion, starting with the problem of Bonapartism, is to provide insights into the false necessity of opposed needs, politics and social conflicts.

Marx and Engels observed during the 1848 Revolutions that failed attempts to overcome capitalism's problems reconstituted its contradictions. This confirmed their dialectical understanding that the working class embodies not only the potential to move beyond capitalism but also the capacity to save and renew it during crises. Engels captured this in a well-known phrase, “the proletariat was not yet able to rule [...], the bourgeoisie could no longer do so” (Engels 1891:617). This statement, referring to the phenomenon of Bonapartism, is often misinterpreted by sociological conceptions of class as a stalemate in class struggle (for example: Beck and Stützle 2018). However, Engels articulated that capitalism is a historical condition with a specific temporality, where society is stuck in a transition phase. In the Marxist view, “Bonaparte’s success [...] the failure of politics” (Cutrone 2015b) signifies the failure to transition into socialism and move forward in history – not just in France, but as *the* condition of modern politics.

Marx saw in Bonapartism “a ‘dictatorship of the bourgeoisie’ – not in the sense of the rule of the capitalists, but rather in terms of the political necessity of the state continuing to organise capitalism on a bourgeois basis and the imperative for doing so after the capitalists had lost the ability to lead through civil society” (Cutrone 2015b). Here, ‘Bonapartism’ serves as a historical prototype, illuminating how the relation of theory (bourgeois conception of emancipation) and practice (class struggle, modern forms of politics, and the state) have historically changed.

Invoking Bonapartism as a historical prototype aims at the historical self-clarification of the condition of modern politics. This approach provides insights into the role of the working class in the ongoing reconstitution of capitalism's contradictions. It also illustrates how these dynamics have shaped and continue to shape modern contradictory forms of politics, revolutions and the authoritarian development of the modern state, which manages societal contradictions expressed in social and political conflicts and discontents.

Thus, the “question is not whether and how state capitalism contradicts socialism, but how to grasp that contradiction *dialectically*” (Cutrone 2015b). Marx and Engels understood “state capitalism, as its Bonapartist state, as a form of *suspended revolution*; indeed, as a form of suspended ‘class struggle’. The

struggle for socialism – or its absence – affects the character of capitalism. Certainly, it affects the *politics* of it” (Cutrone 2015b). Politics, for Marx (1847:180f), *is* class struggle. Both capitalists and the working class are only constituted as political classes through the struggle for socialism, driven by the working class against the capitalists. Without this struggle, we are left with unbridled competition among capitalists, which Horkheimer (1943) described as the formation of rackets. “In the absence of a true Left, politics and the state - capitalism - will be led by others [..., resulting in] hard or soft, and more or less *irresponsible* capitalist state dictatorship. We will have political irresponsibility” and ongoing proletarianization (Cutrone 2015b).

Proletarianization is a dynamic process that continually reconstitutes the working class as a dependent underclass, mixing cultures, diversely gendering, and racializing people globally. In this process, machines serve as “means of destruction not merely in the literal sense: they have made not work but the workers superfluous. The bourgeoisie has been decimated, and the majority of members have lost their independence; where they have not been thrown into the ranks of the proletariat, or more commonly into the masses of unemployed, they have become dependents of the big concerns or the state” (Horkheimer 1942:293).

Without a true Left, the effects of proletarianization will continue to be understood and addressed in reified forms, unconscious of reification, as initially done under the rubric of the social question, where social sciences suggested remedies. These remedies did not provide a perspective to overcome the problem of capitalism but merely to cope with it within the wage system, leading to the development of the welfare state in conjunction with authoritarian measures like police and psychiatry (Dörner 1969, 1988; Neocleous 2021). The need to limit the repercussions of the problem of capitalism also drove the development of the mentioned troubled person industries. Those developments are not immediate expressions of the self-contradiction of capital but are interrelated with other attempts to solve or mitigate the problem of capitalism.

Furthermore, Bonapartism, serving as a historical prototype in Marxist political orientation, emphasizes that the dynamic of irresponsible capitalist state dictatorship can exacerbate during crises, resulting in the identification of politics, society, and state by liquidating the mediation function of political forms. This is done “in the name of quieting the inherent instability of politics, which society in its crisis of capitalism cannot afford” (Cutrone 2015a). Understanding this dynamic as merely “undemocratic liberalism, unbridled capitalism without political accountability to society” is insufficient; it should be grasped as “the state run amok, dominating society, and with a great deal of popular support; [...as] “the reduction of society to a politically undifferentiated mass”, that depends on the authority of others and is incapable of representing itself, which is “the very opposite of what Marx considered the necessary ‘class-consciousness’ of the proletariat” (Cutrone 2014b).

To underscore this aspect of the class struggle, Marx and Engels (1891; 1871; 1848) and other Marxists spoke of an ongoing civil war. Marx was clear that appeals to representatives of the Bonapartist state, the self-proclaimed

“saviours of society”, will just repeat the cycle of destruction, while appearing to the working masses that cannot represent themselves “as their master, as an authority over them, an unlimited governmental power which protects them from the other classes and sends them rain and sunshine from above” (Marx 1852:198f).

Marx was also clear that the ‘saviours of society’ won’t even save themselves from the wrecking of the state run amok. “They had ‘saved’ society from ‘the enemies of society.’ They had given out the watchwords of the old society, ‘property, family, religion, order,’ to their army as passwords. [...] Society is saved just as often as the circle of its rulers contracts, as a more exclusive interest is maintained against a wider one. Every demand of the simplest bourgeois financial reform, of the most ordinary liberalism, of the most formal republicanism, of the most shallow democracy, is simultaneously castigated as an ‘attempt on society’ and stigmatized as ‘socialism’ [and we have to add for today: ‘as fascism’, ‘extremism’, ‘antisemitism’, ‘racism’, ‘sexism’, and so on]. And finally the high priests of ‘religion and order’ themselves are driven with kicks from their Pythian tripods, hauled out of their beds in the darkness of night, put in prison vans, thrown into dungeons or sent into exile; their temple is razed to the ground, their mouths are sealed, their pens broken, their law torn to pieces in the name of religion, of property, of the family, of order. Bourgeois fanatics for order are shot down on their balconies by mobs of drunken soldiers, their domestic sanctuaries profaned, their houses bombarded for amusement – in the name of property, of the family, of religion, and of order” (Marx 1852:123).

Marx did not see the Bonapartist dynamic as the corruption of democracy by external factors. Viewing it this way would encourage a “battle ‘for’ democracy as some yet unattained ideal” (Cutrone 2015b). For Marx, however, “democracy was constitutive of the modern state in bourgeois society and capitalism” (ibid.). He considered Bonapartism to represent the problems inherent in modern politics, implying that socialism, liberal democracy, and other political orientations are internal to this issue. Thus, the question is not whether liberal democracy or socialism is part of the problem, but how they differ in being part of it and how to grasp this dialectically.

I have already hinted at how this problem is expressed in the struggle for socialism: the working class has not only the greatest potential to overcome capitalism but also to reconstitute and save it. This underscores that the problem of modern politics can only be adequately understood dialectically. The issue to grasp is what Howard Dick (2016:2) recognized as “*antipolitics*, which is a paradoxical vision of the political that seeks to eliminate particular conditions that produce the need for politics.” No modern political orientation is immune to antipolitics. Instead, every modern political orientation can be an active element for antipolitics to emerge – including Marxism (Howard 2002).

The dialectics of politics and antipolitics is the issue that Bonapartism illuminates. Bonapartism represents the threat of politics reversing into the antipolitical quieting of politics in the “quest for solid foundations in a modern society whose future must remain open” (Howard 2002:xi). This points us to an

understanding of democracy through democratic revolution that goes beyond theories of liberal democracy, which are insufficient to grasp the instability of modern society, where “all that is solid melts into air” (Marx and Engels 1848:465). Indeed, these theories already contain the seeds for quieting this instability in the name of how society ought to be (Howard 2002).

The issue “with liberal democracy is that it proceeds as if the democratic revolution has been achieved already, and ignores that capitalism has undermined it. Capitalism makes the democratic revolution both necessary and impossible” (Cutrone 2014b). This statement holds two important implications, providing insights into the antipolitical nature of Bonapartism and how to overcome it. First, “democratic revolution reproduces not ‘capitalism’ as some stable system (which, by Marx’s definition, it cannot be) but rather the *crisis* of bourgeois society in capitalism”; and second, the democratic revolution reproduces the crisis “in a *political*, and hence in a potentially *conscious* way” (ibid.).

To understand these implications, it is essential to examine how the political reproduction of society’s crisis manifests in differentiated forms of bourgeois politics. These forms “express the crisis and disintegration of bourgeois social relations. They also manifest the accumulation of past attempts at mediating bourgeois social relations in and through the crisis of capitalism” (Cutrone 2014b). In this sense, democratic revolutions highlight the non-identity of the different mediating elements that constitute the political form of modern bourgeois society. For instance, “the non-identity of law (as legislated), its (judicial) interpretation, and (executive) enforcement, or, the non-identity of civil society and the state, as expressed by the specific phenomenon of modern political parties. States are compulsory; political parties are voluntary, civil society formations. And governments are not identical with legislatures” (ibid.).

As mediating elements, these forms contribute to the inherent instability of modern society. The Bonapartist dynamic seeks to quiet this instability through antipolitics, exacerbating the civil war of capitalism by the unmediated identification of politics with society, thereby liquidating or subordinating the mediating aspects of society. This can manifest in various forms, not only as the Nazi ‘*Gleichschaltung*’ (Howard 2002, 2016). In this sense, manifestations of democracy through revolutions “in capitalism are not only opportunist compromises but also struggles to assert politics” against antipolitics (Cutrone 2014b). This also implies, however, that politics which claim democracy against perceived anti-democratic politics can be antipolitical themselves.

Moreover, the reconstitution of the crisis of society through democratic revolutions indicates the potential to *consciously* manifest contradictions in a *political* way. This potential is realized only if “the struggle for democracy is recognized properly as a manifestation of the crisis of capitalism and hence the need to go beyond bourgeois social relations, to go beyond democracy. Bourgeois forms of politics will be overcome through advancing them to their limits—in crisis” (Cutrone 2014b). However, it is also essential to recognize past attempts at solving the problem of capitalism as the “historical accumulation of political problems in capitalism, and of grasping adequately how these forms are

symptomatic of the development – or lack thereof – of the politics of the struggle for socialism in and through these forms” (ibid.).

Understanding this context helps us see why Marx argued that revolutionary politics are necessary to overcome the Bonapartist dynamic, which, as mentioned, he saw as *the problem* of modern politics. “Its purpose will be to make manifestly political the civil war of capitalism that occurs nonetheless anyway. We are very far from such a politics today” (Cutrone 2015b). This verdict should not be understood merely as advocating for class politics over other forms of politics, although it does so. Instead, it highlights a deeper issue: *the problem* of politics itself is not adequately understood or discussed in emancipatory movements today, thus limiting their options to a restricted understanding of this fundamental issue. This problem is not obvious, as the original vision has been lost in the historical failure of Marxism. It must be rediscovered. The problem becomes clearer when we consider the distance between Marx’s vision and contemporary attempts to realize it.

To understand this distance, it is useful to examine the political culture of the Left that seeks to reinstate class struggle as the central form of Left-wing politics. Here, revolutionary politics are seen as the intensification of class struggle by promoting the proletariat as the working majority that relies on the societal wage fund. The manifesto *Feminism of the 99%* (Arruzza, Bhattacharya, and Fraser 2019) illustrates this approach, aiming to compel all intermediate classes to choose sides between labor and capital. However, this approach not only reduces the theory and practice of class struggle – remember that for Marx, politics *is* class struggle – to a matter of convincing people to identify as proletariat or workers, but it also overlooks the mutual dependence of labor and capital.

Even though such conceptions recognize the class struggle, it is often forgotten today that the recognition of class struggle was not an achievement of socialists but of liberal thought and politics. The class struggle is not a distinguishing criterion for socialism nor for Marxism. However, Marxism is distinguished by its conception of the class struggle, rooted in problem of capitalism. Marx criticized socialists of his time for falling “below the threshold of liberalism in avoiding both the necessity of the separation of classes in capitalism and the necessity of the class struggle resulting from that division of society. Socialists blamed the capitalists rather than recognizing that they were not the cause, but the *effect*, of the self-contradiction of society in capitalism” (Cutrone 2014b).

This self-contradiction must be pursued beyond the false necessity of class conflicts to comprehend the problem of politics. According to Marx, the “proletarianisation of society is not addressed adequately as a matter of the condition of labor, but rather the social dependence on and domination by capital. And capital for Marx is not synonymous with the private property in the means of production belonging to the capitalists, but rather the relation of wages, or the resources for the reproduction of labor-power (including the ‘means of consumption’), to society as a whole. This is what makes it a *political* matter – a

matter of politics in *society* – rather than merely the struggle of one group against another” (Cutrone 2014b).

The historical task to move beyond the problem of capitalism and its endless cycle of destruction means examining political issues in the context of *the* problem of politics in society. For Marxism, this meant drawing political consequences from the insight that the self-destruction of capital can be seen as capitalism trying to abolish itself but failing to do so. Consequently, Marxists envisioned strategically that “the wage-laborers would need to abolish wage labor – the laborers would need to abolish labor. It was not enough that the capitalists destroyed capitalism – that capitalism destroyed capital. The very basis for the reproduction of capital—labor—must be overcome. What society already was doing in capitalism in an unconscious and self-alienated way must be overcome in a disalienated and self-conscious way. But first, it would need to be done consciously: the working class must politically and socially take over and appropriate capitalism before it can be overcome” (Cutrone 2021a).

However, this original vision is far removed from what is considered class politics today. The historical failure of Marxism and the absence of the struggle for socialism have deeply shaped both capitalism and the character of politics within it. As a result, this vision cannot simply be replicated today because this history has profoundly changed the relations of theory and practice that constitute contemporary political orientations. “The difference between Marx’s time and ours is not in the essential problem of society, its self-contradictory form of value between wages and capital, but rather in the social and political conflicts, which no longer take the form primarily, as in Marx’s time, of the ‘class struggle’ between workers and capitalists. ‘Class’ has become a passive, objective category, rather than an active, subjective one, as it had been in Marx’s day and in the time of historical Marxism. What Marxists once meant by ‘class consciousness’ is no more” (Cutrone 2010a).

So, what is to be done today to move beyond the prevailing political culture of despair? It does not mean replacing the historical vision with a poor copy but rather grasping anew the problem of politics in capitalism. This requires an adequate understanding of the problem of capitalism and relating this to the issue of political orientation. It means rediscovering, with emancipatory intent, political orientations as the problem of historically changing relations of theory and practice.

For this purpose, Comparing the original Marxist understanding of this problem with today’s conception of political orientations might be a small step towards transcending the immediacy of today’s prevailing political imagination. The historical gap might help foster a consciousness of this immediacy, thus making a small contribution to moving beyond it.

4.3. The Historical Significance of the Struggle for Socialism

Marxists understood capitalism from the standpoint of world history as a transitional phase, highlighting both modern potential and new restrictions on

freedom. They saw this modern problem of freedom expressed in the desire and political struggle for socialism. This meant for Marxists to grasp the problems of politics and political orientations by clarifying the historic relation between the desire for socialism and other horizons for emancipation. For Marxists, all these aspirations are expressed in reified and alienated forms of politics, which are interrelated as subjective moments driving the societal process.

They believed it was necessary to conceive different political orientations dialectically, as interrelated aspects of society that express various historical horizons for societal transformation. This approach aims to grasp the societal form of politics to develop politics adequate for substantial emancipation. Without it, contradictions could not be consciously manifested and advanced through politics, forfeiting the historical self-clarification necessary for developing political orientations that can move beyond the transitional phase represented by capitalism and realize the potential of societal freedom.

To untangle this, we must revisit the problem of proletarianization that emerged during the Industrial Revolution and understand what distinguished Marx and Engels from their socialist contemporaries. Born in 1818 and 1820, respectively, Marx and Engels were not only passive observers but active participants in the profound political and social changes of the 19th century “was accompanied by the optimistic and exhilarating socialist utopias suggested by these new developments, pointing to fantastical possibilities expressed in the imaginations of Fourier and Saint-Simon, among others” (Cutrone 2008a). Marx and Engels sought to grasp the world-historic meaning of the emergence of proletarianization and the various conceptions of socialism as subjective responses to these changes. They did not invent socialism or communism, but their historical approach set them apart from other radicals.

Especially Marx “tasked himself with understanding the *meaning* of the emergence of proletarian socialism in *history*. Marx was not simply the best or most consistent or radical socialist, but rather the most *historically*, and hence critically, *self-aware*. By ‘scientific’ socialism, Marx understood himself to be elaborating a form of knowledge aware of its own conditions of possibility” (Cutrone 2008a). This required invoking historical prototypes to develop a generalized understanding of historical continuity and discontinuity. To achieve historical self-clarification, Marx, like many of his contemporaries, such as Hegel, invoked the French Revolution, as it was the prevailing prototype to understand and navigate the theory-practice problem of modern politics.

The memory of the revolt of the Third Estate was very much alive in the political culture of the mid-19th century. Marx and Engels “found the workers’ struggles against the capitalists to be motivated by bourgeois consciousness, the consciousness of the bourgeois revolution. Socialism was born in the Jacobinism of the French Revolution, [...] still motivated by the aspirations of ‘liberty, equality and fraternity’. Proudhon, for example, was motivated in his anarchist socialism, avowedly, by Adam Smith and Hegel (and the Bible) — animated, unabashedly, by bourgeois political economy and philosophy. Marx and Engels didn’t think that this was wrong, but only inadequate” (Cutrone 2018b).

They agreed with the other socialists that “the trajectory of this society, from the revolt of the Third Estate and the manufacturing era in the 18th Century to the Industrial Revolution of the 19th Century, indicated the possibility of a further development” (Cutrone 2008a). However, they believed that the historical prototypes of the revolt of the Third Estate and the Industrial Revolution needed to be critically rearticulated to develop an adequate understanding of the problem of capitalism and the new requirements for emancipatory politics. Their grasp of the contradiction of capitalism provided them insights into how proletarianization changed the relations of theory and practice that once offered an adequate horizon for emancipation in bourgeois society. But these relations entered into crisis, rendering the bourgeois horizon of emancipation obsolete and transforming it into an expression of the self-contradiction of society.

In this dialectical perspective, the revolt of the third estate, which “initiated a still on-going and never-to-be-exhausted modern history of bourgeois-democratic revolutions is both the ground for, and [...] the now potentially historically obsolescent social form of politics from which proletarian socialist politics seeks to depart, to get beyond” (Cutrone 2018b). Marx argued in his dialectical critique that the socialism of Proudhon and others was “itself symptomatic of capital: proletarian labor was *constitutive* of capital, and thus its politics was *symptomatic* of how the society conditioned by capital might reveal itself as transitional, as pointing beyond itself. – This was Marx's most fundamental point of departure, [...] that the proletarianization of society was not the overcoming of capital but its fullest realization, and that this – the proletarianized society of *capital* – pointed beyond itself” (Cutrone 2008a).

When Marx and Engels found other socialisms inadequate (not wrong), they underscored that the bourgeois conception of emancipation – as political orientations – was still alive (and is to this day) as subjective moments that reconstitute the contradiction of capitalism and must therefore be understood as part of the problem of politics in capitalism. They recognized this as a necessary condition, arguing that the world could only appear in bourgeois terms because “there were no other terms. There was no other form of consciousness” (Cutrone 2018b). However, the bourgeois conception of emancipation, embodying the measure of value for societal wealth, was made obsolete by industrial production. Efforts to solve the problem of capitalism from within this horizon of emancipation were seen as expressing the self-contradiction of society, recreating the capitalist temporality of a bourgeois society stuck in a transitory phase.

To move beyond this, Marx and Engels did not assume the “need for a new philosophy [...] but only a critique of how bourgeois thought mystified the crisis and task of capitalism” (Cutrone 2018b). What was (and is) required is “a new consciousness of contradiction, a ‘dialectical’ and ‘historical’ ‘materialism’, to properly recognize” the tasks of the “proletarianization of the bourgeois social relations of labor – the society of cooperative production in crisis with the Industrial Revolution” (Cutrone 2018b). However, this task cannot be achieved by the political orientation informed by the historical consciousness embodied in the revolt of the third estate. As Marx wrote: “The social revolution of the

nineteenth century cannot take its poetry from the past but only from the future. It cannot begin with itself before it has stripped away all superstition about the past" (Marx 1852:117). This does not mean abandoning the bourgeois revolution as a historical prototype, which illustrates an important moment in the theory-practice problem, but clarifying how invoking this prototype as an affirmative guide for politics would actually mean "the loss of the true horizon of possibility" (Cutrone 2008a) by mystifying "the crisis and task of capitalism" (Cutrone 2018b).

4.4. Interlude: Today's Ideology-critique versus Clarifying the Theory-Practice Problem

To understand Marx and Engels' conception of critique of ideology as engagement with the problem of historically changing relations of theory and practice, it is helpful to contrast their understanding with today's practice of ideology-critique. While both forms of ideology-critique address political orientations, the political orientation from which they engage in this practice is very different as well as the conception of political orientations. Marx and Engels aimed at the historical self-clarification their own political orientations to engage adequately with the task of capitalism. They did not define political orientations as ideologies but considered political orientations as a problem expressing the self-contradiction of society that necessitates clarifying the historical transformation of the relations between theory and practice of politics.

In contrast, today's ideology-critique constitutes a specific relation of theory and practice. These elaborate practices and material analyses developed only after the failure of Marxism, when theory development aimed at emancipation shifted into universities. Although ideology-critique and its cousin 'deconstruction' often claim to be true successors of Marx's legacy or even improvements, these practices differ significantly from the original version of ideology-critique. These approaches almost never focus on the most progressive ideologies but on what are considered regressive ideologies, such as racism, sexism, and ideologies of inequality more generally. This choice of focus turns ideologies into either a property of the 'other,' criticized from a 'progressive' stance, or considers regressive ideology omnipresent¹⁹.

The common consensus of these perspectives is that people are trapped in false consciousness, which prevents them from recognizing their true interests, assuming that such recognition would lead to emancipation. However, these approaches do not illuminate the problem of how to advance emancipation politically; instead, criticism becomes a value in itself, detached from the historical conditions of politics. They omit the critical historical engagement with the theory-practice problem and can therefore be better considered an expression of this problem by reifying political orientations. Marx and Engels did not seek to liberate people from 'false consciousness' nor did they "think that the poor

¹⁹Terry Eagleton illustrates the first choice by comparing ideology to bad breath, stating, "Ideology, like halitosis, is [...] what the other person has" (1991:2). For an overview of the more elaborate versions that consider ideology omnipresent, see Jan Rehmann (2013).

benighted workers and other subaltern need us intellectuals to tell them what their true social interests are” (Cutrone 2018b).

Such practices, often informed by psychoanalysis or a version of critical psychology, produce elaborate but mystifying categorizations of political orientations. They seek to explain why people do not act as left-wing intellectuals believe they should, based on their standpoint. These explanations implicitly judge and measure the everyday lives of others by the values embodied in external scientific criteria and/or the political orientations of left-wing intellectuals, including their ‘scientifically sanctified’ conception of society (Marvakis 1996:65–78). This becomes evident when examining the definitions of fascism. By demonstrating their scientific advancements through comparing their categorizations of fascism to the ostensibly ‘wrong,’ older *political* definitions of historical Marxism, such practices actually reveal a story of regress rather than progress, failing to understand the historical reasons and political purposes behind categorizing other political orientations.

Kurt Pätzold (2013:118–27) has illustrated this by example of historical definition of fascism by the Communist International²⁰, attributed to Georgi Dimitrov. This definition did not aim to grasp the ahistorical or the whole truth of fascism as a sociological ideal type or as ideology considered as a structural element of bourgeois society. Such ahistorical considerations are the privilege of distanced and detached observers removed from politics. Instead, the Comintern definition aimed to provide orientation in the political struggle of that specific time, focusing only on selective aspects of the phenomenon of fascism. The “ideologists and theorists of the Comintern did not conduct research for [...] encyclopedias. Their goal was to make it clear to themselves and their comrades in a worldwide movement what to think and expect from the two novel” fascist state dictatorships in Germany and Italy (Pätzold 2013:119). To avoid misunderstandings, emphasizing the political orientation value of such categorizations does not result in an uncritical stance towards the Comintern definition, but the opposite. Understanding its (limited) political value is the precondition for adequate criticism (Pätzold 2015:11–34; Renton 2020; Weißbecker 2020:406–19).

However, by not critically and historically engaging with the theory-practice problem, these often academic practices are limited to categorizing different political orientations as distinct entities. Their interrelation is not examined from a historical perspective but is often determined by the immediacy

²⁰ “Ideologists and theorists of the Comintern did not conduct research for [...] encyclopedias. Their goal was to make it clear to themselves and their comrades in a worldwide movement what to think and expect from the two novel, recognizably related state structures, the one established in Italy in 1922 and the recent one in Germany. They issued a warning and provided orientation for the struggle. In short, the brief definitional characterization of the fascist powers – and movements in several countries worked in the 1920s and 1930s to increase their number – was not done with academic but political intent. It was part of efforts to mobilize masses against fascism. For this, it had to be understandable and memorable. Its extreme brevity, as in similar cases, included the risk of misunderstandings and facilitated deliberate misinterpretations. Considering these contexts even from a temporal distance – this may be granted to bourgeois researchers – is difficult for people who have never participated in political struggles or even familiarized themselves with their requirements as observers. There are many such individuals among today's social scientists” (Pätzold 2013:119).

of naturalized social conflicts. Such practices are insufficient for a dialectical understanding of political orientations as different but interrelated subjective moments within the societal process.

Yet, a dialectical understanding is necessary for an adequate political horizon for emancipation, which can only be developed from the standpoint of universal history. As Chris Cutrone explains, the “false necessity of capitalism as self-contradictory but opposed real needs [and the mystification of social and political conflicts] can only be truly engaged and overcome from the standpoint of universal world history. This can only take place from within the social antagonisms of capitalism, and not from partial, single-sided aspects of its contradictory totality” (Cutrone 2020a).

Thus, the original Marxist ideology-critique aimed at the “true consciousness of the workers as well as of the capitalists” to provide political orientation within the contradiction of capitalism (Cutrone 2018b). Marx and Engels focused solely on the self-contradiction of the bourgeois horizon of emancipation in capitalism; not on “its hypocrisy, but its authentic antinomies, which both drove it on and left it stuck” (Cutrone 2018b). Marx and Engels did not invent new political orientations but engaged critically with those they considered the most emancipatorily advanced bourgeois ideologies of their time: German idealist philosophy, English political economy, and French socialist politics. They criticized these dialectically as “true expressions of their historical moment, of the Industrial Revolution. But as such, they were also all false” (Cutrone 2018b).

Their goal was to unveil the historical meaning of “the experience of the struggle for socialism in their time. They did not seek to tell the workers their interest in overcoming capitalism, but rather tried to help clarify the workers’ own consciousness of their historical situation, the crisis of bourgeois society in capital” (Cutrone 2010a). Thus, they interpreted the conflict between the workers and capitalists historically as a new form of class struggle, distinct yet similar to the revolt of the Third Estate.

For Marx and Engels, the desire for ‘socialism’ was not inherently new, as it found its historical inspiration in the revolt of the Third Estate, which limited it to an obsolete horizon of emancipation. Only by clarifying the historical change in the relationship between theory (the ideology of the Third Estate) and practice (the struggle for socialism) could dialectical criticism unveil what was historically new: the desire for “society becoming true to itself, [developing an adequate historical horizon for] the value of the contributions of all society’s members being recognized and their being allowed to participate fully in the development and political direction of humanity” (Cutrone 2010a).

The goal of ‘scientific’ socialism was the development of a form of knowledge “aware of its own conditions of possibility”, capable of manifesting contradictions politically to move beyond capitalism (Cutrone 2008a). However, this is only possible negatively, as there were (and are) only historically obsolete conceptions of emancipation. The negativity is expressed in the Marxist conception of politics, where “workers were meant to replace the capitalist ruling class not merely to eliminate exploitation but to make politically explicit and thus

‘conscious’ the contradiction of capital” (Cutrone 2021a). These contradictions of capital were considered the historical preconditions for and potential path to emancipation, inevitably thwarted by the contradiction of capital if not properly understood theoretically and practically. Thus, an adequate engagement with the theory-practice problem was seen as a precondition for raising these contradictions to consciousness through political means.

4.5. The Role of the Socialist Party to Advance Contradictions

The history of Marxism led to different conclusions about the role of the party, class struggle, and theory for the working class to take political responsibility for the problem of capitalism. Engagement with the history and crisis of Marxism, especially the crisis of the Second International, led Korsch (1923) and Lukacs (1923) to rediscover the theory-practice problem as an adequate horizon for discussing the problem of political orientations.

‘Workers must rule’ encapsulates the need for the organized working class to provide political leadership because if they did not, others would provide leadership to the exploited and oppressed masses, as “Bonaparte had done in 1848 and 1851. The means for this was the political party for socialism. [...] But the party was not *itself* the solution” (Cutrone 2016). It was, metaphorically speaking, the vehicle to manifest the contradictions of capitalism and “the *problem* of political power in capitalism and indeed the problem of “society” itself” (Cutrone 2016).

The conception of ‘the’ political party for Luxemburg, Trotsky, Lenin, and other Marxists was not limited to our contemporary understanding of a singular political party; they did not identify the party with the legal entity of the party. Instead, they thought of it as a political form that constitutes a historical moment in societal development, interrelated with other attempts to change society and the resulting political conflicts. The party as a political form “allowed for conscious participation in all the variety of arenas for politics that had developed in capitalism: parliaments, labor unions, mass strikes and their councils, and popular assemblies including workers’ councils for revolutionary governance. However, as a political form [...] the party was not only or even especially a subject, but also, and perhaps most importantly, an object of political action” (Cutrone 2015a).

The unity of the party, as a political form, was seen dialectically in the non-identical roles of its various elements because the non-identity of theory and practice is necessary to manifest contradictions politically and advance consciousness (Cutrone 2011a). The opposite of this is the condition of Bonapartism, which has plagued the Left in the form of the “long and pervasive, if largely unrecognized, Stalinist inheritance that justifies the party only by identifying it with the people, which puts an end to politics, including political consciousness” (Cutrone 2014b).

The dialectical understanding of the problem of politics and the party in capitalism underscored the need for the socialist movement to encompass “the

wide variety of discontents within the working class and across the history of its developments in capitalism [...] to overcome capitalism become adequate to its task and mission, by becoming conscious of it” (Cutrone 2020a). This is much more complex than today’s endeavors to build an emancipatory movement through intersectionality or other attempts to combine class politics with feminism and anti-racist struggles. In contrast, the strategic Marxist vision underscored and explained the necessity to manifest opposed discontents and needs because capital and labor embody opposed aspects but are inseparable in the self-contradiction of capitalism.

They emphasized the importance of developing political orientations that understand the false necessity of the societal development of opposed but real discontents and needs, as expressed in social and political conflicts: between capitalist politicians over policies and the associated “conflicting interests of different capitalists, such as different industry sectors or capitalist nation-states. [But also] workers employed in different occupations or industries can thus have different and conflicting interests, competing over the priorities of social investment in capital” (Cutrone 2020a). Because of the dialectics of capital and labor, horizontal conflicts cannot be separated from vertical ones: conflicts between workers, competing over investment in capital, can be articulated as conflicts between workers and a capitalist, as illustrated by labor struggles against relocation or closure of a production facility.

Therefore, the standpoint of world history is needed to express politically the wide spectrum of conflicting discontents within capitalism, “encompassing the divisions among the capitalists as well as within capitalism itself as a total movement of society” (Cutrone 2020a). This standpoint tasked the working class with overcoming the false necessity of opposed but real needs to “take responsibility politically for capitalism as a whole. In so doing, the working class would confront the choices posed by the contradictions of capitalism that are otherwise expressed by the conflicts between different capitalists and thus among workers of the world. All the conflicts exhibited in the world must be grasped as expressions and various forms of the self-contradiction of capitalism” (ibid.). This was the political vision to solve the problem of politics within capitalism. This task, within this Marxist perspective, grounds and motivates the historical self-clarification and development of political orientations.

4.6. Clarifying the Problem of Political Orientations

Furthermore, when addressing political orientations that the historical Marxist Left deemed insufficient, they saw this as a prompt for “self-clarification [...] of the struggles and wishes” of their time (Marx 1843:346). They developed categorizations as meaning-making resources to provide orientation within contradictions, appropriate for the emancipatory task. These categories were consciously rooted in political conceptions of historical prototypes aimed at historical self-clarification, unlike the norms and standards for theory development in social sciences. In the absence of the struggle for socialism,

social sciences could fulfill their original political aspiration to be an alternative to socialism (Marvakis in press). Subsequently, these standards and norms shape today's categorizations of the political landscape – the only alternative present today are the politically undesirable categorizations that the far-right provides²¹.

As Horkheimer (1943) argued, sociological and psychological concepts fall short of grasping the meaning of the historical failure of the revolutionary Left – that is, the problem of historically changing relations of theory and practice. This should be juxtaposed with the widespread social scientific categorization, claiming Marxism as an (early) social science, where classes appear as sociological categories expressing group interests. Such an understanding of Marxism, which misrecognizes the political *and* theoretical nature of Marxist dialectics, was prominently criticized by Korsch (1923).

In this spirit, Chris Cutrone clarifies that the Marxist conception of political orientations, such as classes, “did not define politics ‘sociologically,’ but rather historically: as representing not the interests of members of various groups, but as different historical horizons of politics and for the transformation of society” (Cutrone 2014). Thus, we can speak of the standpoint of capital and the proletariat as they embody different historical horizons for engaging with the problem of capitalism. Only in this perspective do Marxist categories make political sense. Contrary to widespread conceptions, these categorizations were not limited to just two standpoints, even though they were deemed the most important, as they expressed the trajectory to politically advance the contradiction of capitalism.

Likewise, the development of further categories for other political orientations was supposed to equip Marxists with the orientation necessary to engage with the task of the problem of politics in capitalism. Therefore, political orientations were categorized in relation to contradictions, opposing needs and crises of the bourgeois horizon for emancipation. This explains the seemingly contradictory employment of terms in compound concepts, such as bourgeois worker party (Lenin 1916), reactionary socialism, petty bourgeois socialism, German socialism, conservative or bourgeois socialism (Marx and Engels 1848).

²¹ When social scientists encounter political orientations that deviate from established norms, such as far-right ideologies or racism, they often regard these orientations as scientifically incorrect rather than politically undesirable. This ahistorical stance assumes that they possess the true conception and blueprint of society. Marvakis scrutinizes this approach, highlighting the ahistorical stance as an attempt by social scientists and their commissioners to overcome the tension between politics and science. He argues that this assumption fosters a paternalistic view, suggesting that only social scientists and philosophers are capable of developing a ‘proper’ conception of society. The “implicit, explicit, and other societal- and future-related assumptions are incorporated into theory formation as an anthropological measure, rather than as (politically and subjectively) justified proposals of how the world should be viewed and where it should develop. Their premises are thus taken for granted in such a way that they are assumed to be self-evident to those being studied [the racist subjects]. The empirical statements of the research subjects do not appear as possible political (counter-)designs that might conflict with the researchers’ political considerations and value judgments but merely as deviations from their own political-scientific norm. But even with racism, nationalism, etc., we must ask where the seemingly anthropological certainty arises that these political orientations are scientifically ‘in themselves’ wrong. [...] Whether these orientations ‘convince’ or prevail is decided in the political struggle of (social) opposites, not in the scientific justification of the untenability of one (social) design by representatives of another” (Marvakis 1996:73f).

Such concepts were utilized to denote specific “horizons of politics”, expressing historical forms “of discontents with capitalism, but ideologically hemmed in by what Marxism regarded as a limited horizon. [...] Various political parties, as well as different political forms, represented different historical horizons for discontents within capitalism. For Marxists, only ‘proletarian socialist’ politics could adequately represent the problem—the crisis and contradiction—of capitalism” (Cutrone 2014b).

Different political forms were understood in the classical Marxist conception as sustained practices that embody history – as for example historical prototypes and past attempts to resolve the problem of capitalism. However, the goal of historical self-clarification demanded not to separate different political forms from each other but to understand their interrelation dialectically. This is a sharp contradistinction to contemporary political thought, expressing the reified thought of alienated political culture. But to conceive of political forms as interrelated was not merely a choice by Marxists but history itself demanded it: “because none of the forms emerging in the capitalist era - since the early to mid-19th century - has existed without the others, they must all be considered together, as mediating (the crisis of) capitalism at various levels, rather than in opposition to one another. Furthermore, these forms do not merely instantiate the bourgeois society that must be overcome - in a reified view - but rather mediate its crisis in capitalism, and inevitably so” (Cutrone 2014b).

By understanding political forms in this way and linking this understanding to the historical clarification of the problem of capitalism, we can gain insights into the contradictions of practices that aim for emancipation but, in effect, reverse or limit emancipatory possibilities. This approach avoids seeking quick fixes in limited psychological conceptions of subjectivity that provide only mystifying answers. However, such insights do not directly overcome the contradictions of these emancipatory practices. It is crucial to recognize the illusion and dangerous fantasy for emancipatory politics to assume that the repetition of historical problems can be simply avoided; this is a dream to escape history. On the contrary, many problems will need to be politically repeated—but with a conscious awareness of the historical differences in their repetition. Moreover, moving beyond prior limits is often impossible in the absence of a Left that truly embodies historical possibility.

Nevertheless, it is essential to recognize that “history cannot be regarded as a catalogue of errors to be avoided, but must be regarded, however critically, as a resource informing the present, whether or not adequately consciously. If past historical problems repeat themselves, they do not do so literally but with a difference. The question is the significance of that difference. It cannot be regarded as itself progressive. Indeed, the difference often expresses the degradation of a problem. One cannot avoid either the repetition or the difference in capitalist history. An adequate ‘proletarian socialist’ party would immediately push beyond prior historical limits. That is how it could both manifest and advance the contradiction in capitalism” (Cutrone 2014b).

4.7. The Left and Right Distinguished by History

We can now summarize the preceding discussion to clarify the distinction between Left and Right politics from the standpoint of universal history. The historical juxtaposition between the Marxist and contemporary distinction I will draw out should contribute to a critical understanding of today's political horizons and forms, highlighting the difference from the prevailing distinction of Left and Right. This will necessarily be schematic and simplify matters and should not be taken as a thorough discussion of today's Left.

Today's distinction resides primarily on values or attitudes towards predefined social problems, defining the Left as striving for social equality and inclusion, and the Right as defending privileges and justifying exclusion. However, this distinction is stuck in a bourgeois conception of emancipation made obsolete by the industrial mode of production. Attempts to solve the problem of capitalism by adhering to this horizon, meaning the reappropriation of capital, will reconstitute but not move beyond the contradiction of capitalism. Furthermore, in today's political culture, the ways in which social conflicts are redefined as 'social problems' are rarely critically examined but taken for granted, concealing the reified preconditions of politics.

In contrast, Marxists historically understood the Left as "a new, unprecedented historical phenomenon [which ...] manifested in political life" when bourgeois society entered into crisis by the late 18th century (Cutrone 2008a). Marx and Engels sought to theoretically and politically engage with the historical meaning of this unprecedented phenomenon while observing, in the wake of the Industrial Revolution, how the progress expected by the Left of their time failed to materialize. Instead of progress, they witnessed the now proletarianized bourgeois society, politically led by the Left, entering crisis again by the mid-19th century.

This led Marx and Engels to deeply engage with the problem of capitalism and the dialectical critique of emancipatory politics. They understood the proletariat as the negative condition of society, tasking the Left with transforming itself into the historical consciousness of this negativity. This transformation was seen as a precondition for developing an adequate political horizon to appropriate capital's potential for freedom and overcome its alienated form. From the standpoint of world history, Marx and Engels clarified and concretized the task of the Left to embody this possibility as historical truth, as society's drive to become true to itself.

The Left, understood as a primarily negative political orientation, embodies the historical capacity and task of the political "clarification of the specificity of the modern problem of social freedom. [... Thus,] it becomes clear that the Left must define itself not sociologically, whether in terms of socioeconomic *class* or a principle of collectivism over individualism, etc., but rather as a matter of *consciousness*, specifically *historical* consciousness" (Cutrone 2008a). This defines the Left as the negation of the historical situation it is part of (Kołakowski 1969), instead of proposing a positive vision or abstract utopia of how society should be. Political programmes and political forms serve as vehicle and not as

solutions. In this negative sense, the revolutionary left aimed to replace “the old bourgeois society, with its classes and class antagonisms” through a revolutionary process with “an association, in which the free development of each is the condition for the free development of all” (Marx and Engels 1848:482).

This perspective entails a distinction of the political left and the political right that is very different to today's established systems of categorizations of political orientations because it assigns a historical task to the left from the standpoint of world history. The left is first and foremost a “consciousness of history and historical *potential* and *possibilities*” (Cutrone 2008a). It is not distinguished from the right by “the struggle against oppression — which the modern Right also claims. The Right does not represent the past but rather the foreclosing of possibilities in the present. For this reason, it is important for us to recognize the potential and fact of regression that the possibilities for the Left in theory and practice have suffered as a result of the abandonment of *historical* consciousness in favor of the *immediacies* of struggles against *oppression*” (Cutrone 2008a).

The historical chasm between the political imagination of the historical Marxist Left and today's Left becomes more pronounced when contrasting their categorization of right-wing political orientations and their conception of the problem of politics. To explain the difference, I will only selectively and schematically discuss the New Left, using it as an umbrella term for the emergence of the new social movements and counterculture in the 60s and onwards, which exploded in 1968 and was driven by the emerging new middle classes. I am not considering its origins in relation to the failure of Marxism, which would be needed for an adequate treatment of the subject (for thorough discussion see: Cutrone 2012, 2018a, 2023).

I have described how Marxists understood political forms and orientations as different historical horizons to engage with the problem of capitalism, which were seen as dialectically interrelated moments of history. Past attempts at mediating bourgeois social relations in and through the crises of capitalism were seen as accumulation of political problems of capitalism, expressed in different but interrelated political forms. Since they considered emancipation impossible from partial, single-sided aspects of society's contradictory totality, they deemed it essential to encompass the wide spectrum of opposed discontents to politically manifest and advance the contradiction of capitalism. This was considered necessary to overcome the antipolitical, bonapartist dynamic, which represented the problem of politics. The foreclosure of emancipation, embodied by the political Right, was seen as failure of the dialectical politics of the Left (Bloch 1935; Reich 1933; Zetkin 1923).

The New Left appears to have lost this Marxist understanding of political forms as historically interrelated moments. Instead, the New Left attempted to interrelate different forms of oppression by conceptually separating them into the categories of Race, Class, and Gender. These categories are theoretical abstractions providing a more or less transhistorical perspective on oppression, under which the history of capitalism is subsumed. For instance, the oppression

of women predates capitalism (Lerner 1986; Patou-Mathis 2021). While there is no consensus on the historical origin of racism and whether it is a purely modern form of oppression, it is certain that racism emerged before the industrial revolution (Fredrickson 2003; Miles and Brown 2003).

According to the interpretation I follow, capitalism began with the industrial revolution rather than through exploitation, marking a world-historic turning point. When the emergence of capitalism is explained through its prehistory in colonialism and/or inner European racism, it assumes exploitation as the cause of capitalism rather than its effect, by emphasizing historical continuity (Bhattacharyya 2018; Robinson 1983). However, this perspective cannot sufficiently explain how capitalism emerged as the self-contradiction of bourgeois society, dominated by capital. This can only be understood by examining how bourgeois society entered into crisis through the industrial revolution.

In this sense, the categories of Race, Class, and Gender reverse the Marxist approach, which emphasizes the self-contradiction of bourgeois society in capitalism and its historically specific antinomies that drive bourgeois society while keeping it in a transitional phase. The Marxist view considers political orientations as interrelated subjective moments that attempt to solve the problem of capitalism but have so far only reconstituted it, leading to the historical accumulation of political problems that shape the societal form of politics. While the New Left's categories aim to understand political orientations historically, they fail to grasp the concrete historical forms of politics and political orientations as expressions of the contradiction of capitalism. Instead, they recontextualize these orientations and forms under capitalism in a transhistorical perspective, often treating them as independent forces of history. This is evident in debates about the interrelation of Race, Class, and Gender, whereas Marxists sought to understand the self-contradiction of society. Consequently, the New Left's approach is primarily past-oriented (expressed in social justice), while the Marxist approach highlights the specific temporality of capitalism, pointing to a future society in which capital's potential for freedom has been realized.

However, the New Left understood its development of its new political orientations by the aforementioned categories as theoretical progress compared to the historical Marxist Left, which they understood as one-dimensional. But it was the New Left's interpretation of Marxism that confused the working class with the white male industrial worker, instead of understanding the historical constitution and reconstitution of the working class through the dynamics of proletarianization, tasking the Left with the development of adequate 'negative' political consciousness.

After all, the New Left failed to grasp the crisis of Fordist capital in the late 60s and early 70s in both theory and practice. The international accumulation regime of Fordism, including the Eastern bloc, was characterized by high wages and low profits. Its crisis resulted in the collapse of the Fordist welfare state model and marked the beginning of the end of the Eastern bloc, which lacked a political revolution capable of revolving the crisis. The resolution of this crisis came through the neoliberal political revolution that successfully reappropriated

capital. The New Left's was hindered to grasp the crisis by its preconception that political change by democratic means is the hallmark of the Left. The success of neoliberal politics challenged the New Left's assumptions, leading to frustration when mainstream politics achieved change driven by the Right through democratic means "rather than through the Left's own 'revolutionary politics'". Capitalism has continued and will continue through political revolutions of greater or lesser drastic character" (Cutrone 2023:104).

The majority of the New Left addressed this defeat by abandoning Marxist theory in practice, replacing or blending it with post-structuralism, which they deemed more adequate for understanding the 'postmodern' condition. Although most of the New Left initially identified as socialist, (neo)anarchism became a more commonly used label (Cutrone 2012). Instead of critically and historically reflecting on the political orientations of the Left, they turned to culture and subjectivity, focusing on the emergence of the new Right to understand the failure of the Left.

Undoubtedly, conceptions like 'racism without races', 'differential racism', 'culturalist racism', or 'retorsion' generated insights into the changing semantics of racism, which replaced biology with culture and inequality with difference (Balibar 1991, 2005; Miles and Brown 2003; Taguieff 2001). However, these insights could only mitigate the success of the Right and resist new forms of racism, but they lost sight of collective societal emancipation. Similarly, feminism abandoned the vision of historical emancipation in favor of micro-politics. This shift offered new insights but was ultimately thwarted by the success of the Right. In this context, culture and subjectivity were employed to explain the persistence of patriarchal oppression despite the efforts of older New Left feminism (Butler 1990; Wolf 1992), comprehending the success of the new Thatcherite and Reaganite right-wing politics as antifeminist backlash (Faludi 1991).

This reorientation was assumed sufficient to advance the feminist and antiracist agenda of the New Left in neoliberalism: challenging cultural norms, oppression, and discrimination, and furthering gender and racial equality, empowerment, and diversity. In contrast to these more influential political orientations of the New Left, what has constrained "the sectarian 'Marxist Left' has been the freezing of the theory-practice problem, which then continued to elude a progressive-emancipatory solution at any given moment. Particular historical moments in the theory-practice problem have become dogmatized by various sects [Trotskyists, Leninists, Maoists, council communists, etc.], thus dooming them to irrelevance" (Cutrone 2010a).

The underlying problem of all these developments is not, in my opinion, the prioritization of culture versus economy or vice versa, but the insufficient treatment of the theory-practice problem of left-wing politics. This insufficiency arises either from fetishizing a specific moment in the history of this problem (as seen with the sectarian Left) or from fetishizing the Right or oppressive ideology/cultural practices as the problem. This resulted in the loss of the dialectical understanding of the interrelation of different political forms and discontents in the societal totality. Furthermore, this loss obscured the fact that a

Left based on categories like social justice and equality cannot sufficiently distinguish itself politically from the Right. Distinctions rooted in those categories disguise not only that the Left and the Right are claiming similar concepts in justifying politics but also that both are rooted in the historical horizon of the ideology of the Third Estate.

Prevailing distinctions of the Left and the Right, with Noberto Bobbio (1996) serving as a paradigmatic example, commonly refer directly or indirectly to the French Revolution. The French Revolution serves as a historical prototype, distinguishing the Left as those seeking to advance the revolution's progressive values, and the Right as those aiming to slow this process or revert to an aristocratic system. Consequently, the Right is seen as defenders of inequality and liberty based on privilege, while the Left is viewed as the historical force for advancing social equality and justice.

However, this common conception overlooks how the political challenge of 1848 and the emerging contradictions of capitalism profoundly transformed both the Left and Right that emerged from the French Revolution. It mistakenly casts the Right as representing the past, while in reality, it has shaped modern mass politics as much as the Left. Modern mass politics were alien to the 'old' pre-1848 aristocratic Right (Saul 2015). Additionally, it is incorrect to view the Right as representing the past because they do not seek a return to a pre-capitalist society (Davidson 2015). They are capitalists, followers of capital – like everyone else. Most importantly, the Right cannot be anchored in the past because it is entrenched in the immediacy of the present of capitalism, defined by the false necessity of opposed but real needs, without offering any political perspective to overcome this false necessity. Providing such a political perspective is the historic responsibility of the Left. This is what differentiates the Left from the Right as a subjective force in history.

Furthermore, social equality *and* social justice are not unique to the Left but can also be claimed by the Right that emerged after 1848. The prototype of 1848 helps clarify this counterintuitive idea. This will require recalling some aspects of the preceding discussion. The examination of the Bonapartist condition of modern politics, characterized by a society stuck in transition, has shown that capital-reconstituting struggles are the norm under capitalism, with even the working class having an interest in such efforts. These struggles are not due to ideological blindness but rather to the obsolescence of the political horizon of the Third Estate, which fails to grasp proletarianization.

Moreover, the division of capital and labor does not cause capitalism; it is an effect of capitalism's self-contradiction. The opposed aspects of capital and labor are inseparable; they need each other although their needs have become opposed in capitalism. The conflicts and opposing needs resulting from this self-contradiction are false but real necessities. This leads to a multitude of problems, and attempts to resolve them regularly fail to bring intended or lasting effects, thus constituting widely observable phenomena that express the crisis of values of bourgeois society.

However, these issues are rarely recognized as crisis but instead appear as hypocrisies – promises not kept – because these problems are already recognized

as issues within bourgeois society. Even if the values of bourgeois society are criticized as a whole, either from the Left or the Right, it is done within the political horizon of the Third Estate (Nobbio 1996 serving again as an example). The rejection of those values does not escape this horizon. This rather illustrates that, what is seen as bourgeois value and what should be valued as value is conflicted, illustrated by differences in seeing mass society as egalitarian leveling, demoralization, or degeneration. This is why both the Left and the Right can 'legitimately' make claims of social equality and justice.

The New Left claims, that the Right would not embody true 'justice' and 'equality' and would make those claims only for opportunistic reasons. This is not false as such, but insufficient, since the Right also claims that the New Left would twist those concepts ideologically to advance its particularist agenda. The Right frequently uses this conflict about values as illustration that politics or life in general would be nothing but a struggle for power. This premise is often shared by 'post-marxist' intellectuals of the New Left, arguing dissent and conflict should be seen as the core of radical democracy (Laclau and Mouffe 1985; Mouffe 2000).

Whose claim to 'justice' and 'equality' is justified cannot be decided scientifically or philosophically; it is a political question. This should not lead to relativistic conclusions about the Left and the Right but highlight the aporias²² that arise when distinguishing the two through values. These aporias can be overcome by recognizing that the preconditions for making opposed and legitimate claims on justice and equality are based on different premises of how to conceive of society. Unfortunately, the Left often assumes these premises to be self-evident to their political opponents on the Right. If those opponents don't subscribe to these premises, the widespread explanation is that they must be blinded by ideology. While I can only superficially discuss these aporias here, I will outline some main trajectories:

When society is presumed to be a meritocratic system, social equality refers to equality of opportunity. Introducing measures of redistribution in such a system would be seen as discrimination. Conversely, if society is considered a discriminatory system producing social inequality, social equality can either refer to equality of outcome, demanding measures of redistribution, or transforming the system to ensure equality of opportunity. Thus, the Left and the Right can agree that inequality is socially produced. However, if society is seen as a functioning meritocracy, inequality of outcome could be interpreted as 'proof' of natural human inequality. Thus, social equality can be used to 'prove' natural inequality.

²²Jason Stanley (2015:178–291) has an interesting but ahistorical discussion of this issue, using the tools of analytic philosophy. However, he does not see the significance of the problem of political orientations and instead 'solves' this issue philosophically by reverting to a version of class interested founded deliberative democracy and the concept of epistemic injustice by Miranda Fricker (2007). Although Ishay Landa (2009) does not discuss this problem explicitly in his study of the similarities between fascist and liberal tradition. However, his book provides rich material to study this issue. Athanasios Marvakis (1996) has referred to this issue explicitly as methodological limitation of social sciences inquiring into political orientations.

These aporias are not coincidental or merely philosophical problems; they represent the false necessity of opposed but real discontents and viewpoints. Rather than presuming the associated premises as self-evident, the task is to clarify the understanding of society while taking the partialities of standpoints seriously, as expressions of the self-contradiction of capitalism.

In this sense, the Marxist view of capitalism suggests that the contemporary conflict between the New Left and the new Right is essentially about different priorities for social investments in capital. In the current context, if a value crisis of capital is resolved through political revolution, it is not merely a question of values or class compromise but rather which social investments can preserve the value of capital. While it is not irrelevant whether social investments in capital are dictated by the values of the Right or the Left, it is essentially confined to “hard or soft, and more or less irresponsible capitalist state dictatorship” (Cutrone 2015b).

Capital continues to dominate society, and politics remains irresponsible. Both the Left and the Right can make claims for social investment in capital in the name of social justice or social equality because these concepts are appropriated from partial standpoints within the contradictory totality. Even if the Left claims to have a universal standpoint, this does not necessarily hold true.

The partiality of standpoints cannot be overcome by ethics of inclusion or theories of universality because capital is the ‘true’ universal, dominating society; it cannot be simply claimed. It can only be overcome negatively from the standpoint of world history within the social antagonism of capitalism. The historic responsibility of the Left is not to be merely ‘against’ the Right, protesting its hypocrisies. The Left must be historically ahead of the foreclosure of emancipation by the Right. The Left can only do this by embodying a historical consciousness about the concrete emancipatory potential of society. Its job is to stay ahead of the curve by advancing contradiction. This necessitates encompassing a wide spectrum of discontents and opposing needs of the working class, politically manifesting, and advancing the contradiction of capitalism through adequate political forms that can build the necessary consciousness of historical possibilities.

However, as Chris Cutrone points out, “this task has been abandoned in favour of what are essentially capital-*reconstituting* struggles, attempting to cope with the vicissitudes of the dynamics of modern history. But this re-assimilation of Marxism[and/or the New Left] back into ideology characteristic of the revolt of the Third Estate means the loss of the true horizon of possibility that motivated Marx and gave his project meaning and urgency” (Cutrone 2008a).

4.8. Interim Reflection: The Theory-Practice Problem in Therapy

After having redefined the problem of the far-right as the question of historically changing relations of theory and practice, I will now start connecting this analysis to the practice of therapy. Considering my elaboration so far, it should be clear that there is no simple way of transferring insights from this analysis to

therapy. Indeed, it is important not to confuse emancipation in politics with emancipation in therapy (Knebel 2018, 2019). Both are distinct forms of *political* practice. Therapy is, like psychology, “*politics with other means*” (Marvakis 2022:155).

As should be evident by now, the political orientations of therapists and clients will inevitably influence the trajectory of therapy. To understand this, we must conceive of politics in a broad sense as “a constitutive moment of every human action, encompassing ‘transcendent’ references beyond the concrete acting individual and the individual act. Agency cannot only be the performing, executing, carrying-out of certain (given) tasks. We also have to recognize its anticipative and creative dimensions, its ability to answer (given) questions, solve (existing) problems, and formulate questions and indicate phenomena as problematic and calling for action” (ibid.).

Thus, political orientations are essential in our everyday conduct of life to make sense of ourselves and the world we live in to have agency in shaping our world in meaningful and intentional ways, while often leading to unintended contradictory outcomes. This holds true for therapists as well as their clients (Dreier 2008). However, it is insufficient to explain contradictory outcomes solely by referring to one or another ahistorical conception of the mischiefs of the unconscious. History must be adequately considered because “there is no primary unconscious; unconscious appears as a quality of [the theoretical conception of] subjectivity. Subjectivity as a cultural-historical formation [encompassing its theoretical articulations] is not anchored in a universal condition of individuals” (González Rey 2021:40).

In other words, different approaches in therapy (and psychology), including critical or emancipatory approaches, are not simply theories, techniques, or methods to be applied but always relations of theory and practice or of knowledge and skills/capacities (Dafernos et al. 2013; Holzkamp 1988; Markard 2019). This implies that different approaches are also different orientations to the historically dominant psychology/therapy and its institutionalized relations of theory and practice in universities, health and social systems, training institutes, publishing houses, professions, professional associations, clients as free customers or forced patients, and so on (Dafernos et al. 2013; Marvakis 2019).

Furthermore, different approaches have to orient themselves towards other approaches and especially towards the dominant one. This is not a matter of choice but a necessity because the different approaches of therapy (and psychology) are part of the societal process. They have to compete over societal resources, including clients/patients/research subjects, by claiming the ownership of social problems, as highlighted by the existence of professional associations, advocacy, and lobbying groups (Burstow 2015; Cohen 2016; Frawley 2024; Hilgartner and Bosk 1988; Marvakis 2019, 2022).

When viewed in this light, it should be clear that emancipatory-intended therapy can learn from historical investigations into the theory-practice problem of emancipatory politics. While cautioning against drawing simple analogies, I suggest that the theory-practice problem must be specifically rediscovered for therapy. This should be understood as the “necessity of a continuous, historical-

societal contextualization of (critical) psychology [which] assigns us many tasks for the coming decades” (Marvakis 2019:25). Here, I can only offer some preliminary remarks.

When we take the conceptions of political orientations as subjective moments of the societal process seriously, it becomes clear that not only has the development of therapy been heavily influenced by politics, but therapy itself can be considered a form of politics. Professionals and their (political) organisations actively participate in the transformation of capitalism because they must compete for societal resources, having to prove their capacity to preserve the value of capital. If they fail to re-legitimize their recognition, they risk losing the resources they enjoy (Marvakis 2019).

This dynamic is particularly evident in the resolution of the crisis of capital through neoliberal politics. As Marvakis (2022:157) notes, psychology's “basic virtue” in the neoliberal transformation involves contributing to the “extended ‘*commodification of the psychic*’,” reframing “social phenomena as private commodities”, responding to “individual, private demands and ,in the neoliberal logic”, being privately paid for.

To develop my argument I refer to Marvakis (2022:157) distinction of two different political-epistemological perspectives: The “‘*perspective of bureaucracy*’ – probing for knowledge about people and the management of human action confined to only performance, execution.” This technocratic form of politics in therapy involves carrying out societally assigned tasks without questioning their broader implications. Second, the “‘*social-movement-perspective*’, interested in knowledge for people who are co-defining questions and co-deciding about potential answers and solutions to be pursued”. This emancipatory or critical form of politics in therapy questions and clarifies given tasks to move beyond their restrictions. Marvakis (2019:34) considers the latter perspective “the historical, ideological counter-model to the dominant social sciences of the 20th century,” noting that it has often survived only “as a ‘critique of the mainstream,’ as the illegitimate half-sister of the discipline’s most current mainstream”.

We must remember that the emergence of the social sciences in the 19th century was seen as an alternative solution to socialism for addressing the problem of proletarianization (Marvakis in press). Since socialism failed, the question of the “survival” of the counter-model to dominant social science indicates that an adequate inquiry into the theory-practice problem of the forms of politics in therapy must consider not only the problem of capitalism but also the problem of politics in capitalism, taking seriously the historic failure of the Marxist Left. I will explain this in several steps.

As a first step, technocratic forms must be analyzed as a co-evolution of therapy practices, the welfare state, and the troubled person industries. These forms express past attempts to solve the problem of capitalism and mediate, as interrelated accumulated problems, the crisis of bourgeois society dominated by capital. This context is also crucial for understanding critical approaches; releasing them from this context would mean understanding them from an ahistorical and technocratic standpoint.

The advancement of therapy practices towards accountability in emancipation has aimed at exposing the political nature of established practices in therapy and psychiatry, striving to institutionalize more progressive standards (Burstow 2015). However, contradictory outcomes of these efforts can be observed. Understanding and framing how the politics of therapy resulted in a repetition of these problems instead of overcoming them must be carefully considered. Undesirable outcomes should not be attributed solely to competing conservative approaches or to having the wrong theory. Additionally, proposing quick fixes, such as better approaches without an adequate understanding of the problem, is not desirable.

Emancipatory-intended therapy cannot be imagined without acknowledging the history and impact of emancipatory politics; it draws from the same concepts and political prototypes. This influence extends beyond therapy practice to the everyday lives of therapists, including the politics of therapy itself, making the theory-practice problem of politics relevant to therapy. Thus, emancipatory-intended therapy (and its broader politics) can learn a crucial lesson: the problem of political orientations as historically changing relations of theory and practice “is not a matter of formulating a correct theory and then implementing it in practice. It is rather a question of what Lukács called ‘historical consciousness’ [of the contradictory totality]” (Cutrone 2010a).

Given that the historical trajectory of therapy is intertwined with the fate of the welfare state and its associated institutions and markets, shaped by past efforts to address the problem of capitalism, we can see that establishing new standards, whether ‘progressive’ or technocratic, is invariably linked to the problem of politics in capitalism. This connection helps us understand how various forms of therapeutic politics have contributed – some intentionally, others unintentionally – to the emergence of a culture of vulnerability and despair (Cohen 2016; Frawley 2024; Haslam 2016; Haslam, Tse, and De Deyne 2021; Moncrieff 2022).

The connection between the problem of politics in capitalism and the politics of therapy becomes even clearer when considering how the contradictions of the New Left were expressed through one of its political projects: the deinstitutionalization of psychiatry. This initiative has not resolved the issues it aimed to address. Instead, it has indirectly promoted the psychiatrization of everyday life, effectively aiding neoliberal politics in finding new profitable ways to manage proletarianization and preserve the value of capital (Beeker et al. 2021; Dörner 2002; Goulart 2019; Mills 2014).

Examining the contradictory outcomes requires us to consider the role of criticism. We previously defined criticism indirectly by describing emancipatory forms of therapy and their practices as efforts to critically reflect on and move beyond the constraints of societally assigned tasks. However, the true impact of critical approaches cannot be fully understood by simply accepting their self-descriptions. Claiming criticality often signifies a desire to transcend mainstream limitations, yet critical approaches remain bound by history and cannot claim a monopoly on critique.

In this sense, critique can easily become reified – as a property or trait of an approach, a quality of thinking, an identity, or even as another “type of ‘fetish’ we embellish ourselves with [...] ‘criticality’ can effortlessly be transformed into a ‘technocratic’ tool” (Dafernos et al. 2013:11). For instance, asserting criticality as a property or quality can be a strategy to gain an edge over other critical approaches when competing for societal resources. Understanding this reification of the desire to be critical helps us see how the politics of therapy can become fixated on the immediacy of false necessities, thereby unintentionally repeating problems.

Understanding the reification of critique requires us to conceptualize critique as an orientation – a “relationship with the historical mainstream as the counterpart; it is a social relationship in which real subjects (must) form historical regimes of agency in and for their lives” (Marvakis 2019:24), encompassing the changing relationships among the critics themselves (ibid.). Engaging in these relationships is inevitably informed by historical concepts of emancipation, providing different horizons for societal transformation. Thus, even therapy intended to be emancipatory can engage with a technocratic or otherwise limited horizon. This holds especially true if emancipation is considered as something that therapists provide for their clients and society, rather than recognizing that their own emancipation depends on capital, which enables them to work as therapists. Such horizons remain stuck in the false necessity of capitalism.

To avoid getting fixated on the immediacy of false necessities, it is crucial to recognize that critical and emancipatory approaches have almost exclusively emerged within Fordism as critiques of Fordism. Viewing the ‘social movement perspective’ as a historically changing relationship underscores that the emancipatory horizon of these approaches is tied to the fate of the New Left. From the 60s onwards, the New Left believed it “was rebelling against capitalism, and thought it was doing so more profoundly than the preceding “Old” Left was able to do. But now it is difficult to deny that it was responding to one particular form of capitalism, one already in the process of dissolution. The New Left did not reach deeply enough to affect much of the subsequent transformation of capitalism in the 1980s–90s, but it did serve to legitimize the replacement of what had grown obsolete” (Cutrone 2009b). This misinterpretation of Fordism as capitalism is not confined to poststructuralist and post-Marxist approaches but also extends to Marxist approaches that co-evolved with the New Left (Marvakis 2019).

However, an adequate understanding of capitalism cannot be simply gained by reading Marx's *Capital*, as suggested by the Capital reading groups that emerged as part of the New Left. These groups hoped to rediscover Marxism and make it viable again but were limited by a sociological interpretation of Marxist dialectics. It is crucial to consider the historical changes in the social relations of critique to understand this fully. To this end, we must grasp the historical meaning of the emergence of critical approaches under Fordism. Fordism, including the state capitalism of the Eastern Bloc, could only evolve because of the historical failure of Marxism – or more generally, the revolutionary workers'

movement. This is why therapy and psychology, despite their criticality, are enmeshed with the accumulated problems of past attempts to solve the problem of capitalism.

The horizon of the New Left did not solve these problems but instead became part of them. Critical and emancipatory approaches to therapy are also entangled in this issue. This is not only because the emancipatory horizon of these approaches is informed by the horizon of the New Left, making it difficult to move beyond false necessities, but also because the failure of the New Left has shaped the societal and cultural conditions in which therapy takes place today. Therefore, for (re)discovering the theory-practice problem in therapy, the failure of the Left must be taken into account.

4.9. Far-right orientations in therapy as theory-practice problem

Investigating the problem of right-wing orientations in emancipatory therapy offers a viable trajectory for exploring the theory-practice problem in therapy, as it intersects with the contradictions of therapy and contemporary politics. However, this requires a careful calibration of our viewpoint. A perspective that foregrounds contradictions is needed. Therefore, I propose redefining issues encountered with right-wing clients in emancipatory therapy as problems of motivation.

Formulated as questions: How can therapy with right-wing clients foster the meta-motivation to change their 'right-wing motivation' towards questioning their political orientation? How might clients develop a desire to revise their political convictions? What can therapists contribute to cultivating such a desire? What might motivate therapists to question their own political orientation? How can therapists find the meta-motivation to examine their desire to be critical anew?

Pursuing these questions will provide insights into the motivational trajectories that have captured and limited the desire of emancipatory and critical approaches to move beyond restrictions. Instead of achieving this goal, these limiting trajectories have restricted the desire for emancipation itself. Consequently, these approaches have only contributed to the societal transformation from Fordism to neoliberalism and now struggle to move beyond the immediacy of the present political culture. By investigating the problem of motivation, we can gain insights into more profound trajectories for emancipation beyond the false necessities of the present.

To further refine our viewpoint, we need to revisit key aspects of the preceding discussion on fabulation, historical prototypes, and the culture of despair. It's essential to understand fabulation not as a problem but as a resource for engaging with these questions. Reified accounts, as I will explain soon, cannot be avoided; instead, the task is to become conscious of these accounts. After recalling these aspects, we will delve into the contradictions of motivation, shedding light on the societal task assigned to psychology and therapy. This exploration will help clarify how motives for emancipation emerge that provide

trajectories for transcending the immediacy of false necessities. This journey will lead us through an examination of the emancipatory value of Lukács's theory of reification and Ágnes Heller's concept of consciousness that exceeds its bounds, ultimately discovering Marx's notion of the social individual as a profound horizon for emancipation.

Fabulation, as a sense-making process, inevitably draws on reified accounts of the contradictions expressed in the problems of motivation and politics in capitalism. However, it also relies on historical prototypes, which serve as subjective resources to reimagine the horizon of emancipation. By grounding these reflections in adequate theoretical concepts, fabulation can potentially contribute to an awareness of reification. Therefore, it is crucial to recall some aspects of the culture of despair.

Starting with the widespread reification of unwanted political orientations through 'scientific' explanations, these explanations elevate the scientific standpoint and disguise the politics behind it, thereby avoiding political conflict. Such attempts claim a superior scientific perspective that presumes to understand the essence of social reality objectively, suggesting that individuals embodying rejected political orientations (such as the far-right) lack insight into societal reality and are limited to perceiving the superficial appearance of social reality (Marvakis 1996:68). From this standpoint, right-wingers are assumed to act against their interests, are subject to unconscious motivation, entrapped in defense mechanisms, and/or their socialization as authoritarian personalities, and so on. All this implies a paternalistic standpoint claiming to know what the 'true' interests of the right-winger in question are. This can be prominently observed in the practice of claiming scientific truth in encounters with conspiracy theories (to a lesser degree concerning 'fake news'), which are conceived of as denying the truth and value of science. It should be clear by now that such practices should be understood as reified expressions of the lack of truly emancipatory politics. Marx and Engels (1848) called such visions to replace politics by technocratic practices bourgeois socialism.

Understanding the reification of political orientations historically through the failure of the Left is crucial. Compared to historical Marxists, the Left that emerged later has regressed to a more modest bourgeois horizon of emancipation, limited to transforming capitalism (Cutrone 2021a, 2023). Regardless of one's stance on the plausibility of rediscovering the Marxist vision for emancipation, ignoring the historical impact of the Left's failure on contemporary political culture will inevitably naturalize the immediacy of contemporary political culture as the only true horizon for politics. While reified accounts of societal reality cannot be entirely avoided, fabulations that attempt to make sense of encounters with the far-right by drawing on this political culture will likely remain unconscious of this reification.

The tendency to present a reified account of societal reality without conscious recognition is reflected in prevailing naturalized theory-practice relations, which often employ causal thinking like the 'broken window' theory to make sense of the contemporary successes of the far-right. Lacking a historical perspective on the effects of the absence of the struggle for socialism, these

appeals typically call on the bourgeois-controlled state as the historical subject to resolve problems within capitalism. Such claims, made by both social movements and state actors, engage people in addressing capitalism's problems in reified ways while not cultivating a conscious recognition of this reification.

Therefore, fabulation addressing the emergence of far-right orientations in such ways can be seen as a limited reimagination of the prevailing political culture, failing to move beyond the immediacy of its false necessities. This often results in quasi-apocalyptic crisis definitions that suggest everything is changing for the worse and that individuals have little or no influence on historical development, rendering the imagination of substantial emancipation impossible.

Nevertheless, dismissing these naturalized orientations as simply wrong would overlook the creative sense-making capacity of fabulation. Reification, as I will explain in more detail, is inescapable and embodies an epistemological value that can help move beyond the prevailing political culture. Viewed in this light, political orientations limited to the culture of despair are partially accurate, as they express a historical truth: no socialist development seems conceivable right now due to the absence of an organized, class-conscious proletariat. This condition can be drawn out because it is already implicit in such fabulations. Reflecting on the historical prototypes these fabulations use to imagine progress seems viable. It is important to contrast the employed prototypes with other possibilities, such as 1848, to avoid cultural pessimism and generate more substantial insights into the recurring problem of political imagination expecting progress and getting paralyzed by the failure of progress to manifest. The Frankfurt School has extensively reflected on this situation, particularly when not read in conservative ways but situated within the broader history of Marxism (Cutrone 2024; Dahmer 2019).

On the other hand, this culture of despair harbors significant ideology, making it difficult to rediscover political orientations as a problem of historically changing theory-practice relations. Social relations, the result of human practice, are reified in this culture to appear as unchangeable nature, rendering political emancipation unimaginable. As Lukács explains, this reification is not only 'in' consciousness but inscribed in societal relations, particularly given the absence of political forms that express the theory-practice relations of proletarian socialism, which could cultivate consciousness of this reification. Consequently, the conditions of capitalism – which always pose an existential threat, sometimes more sometimes less for someone than others – are currently exacerbated in the prevailing political culture. This is intensified by solutions claiming to mitigate existential threats.

This issue applies even to solutions with emancipatory intent. For instance, authoritarian state measures to combat the far-right, such as increased police presence ostensibly for security, actually contribute to collective insecurity. Similarly, 'leftist' notions that primarily see problems in the authoritarian 'character' place the blame on others, thereby reducing their own agency and concluding that subjectivity is incapable of self-rule and must be governed. Such a culture of despair, as I will outline in part 4 with Ute Osterkamp, provides

subjective credibility to far-right orientations that claim to save ‘the people’ from misery while simultaneously intensifying that misery.

Chapter 5: The contradiction of motivation – Consciousness Exceeding its Bounds

Understanding potential pathways to move beyond the prevailing culture of despair requires avoiding any form of naivety. Following the Marxist hypothesis, this task necessitates comprehending the development of motivations fort transcending the restraints of capital. As a starting point, I suggest examining the problem of motivation within the peculiarities of the societal situation of therapists to explore the contradictions inherent in the reified problems they encounter. This includes the issues that arise when they are confronted with far-right orientations in their workplace, which are subsequently interpreted and fabulated in reified terms.

5.1. The Contradiction of Motivation

Almost every therapy involves, in some form, the task of cultivating meta-motivation—that is, the motivation to change one’s motivation. This task is rooted in a historical contradiction that Ute Osterkamp (1975, 1976) and Kurt Danziger (1997) have independently explored. As summarized by Morten Nissen: “‘Motivation’ is whether, how much and why people want to do what they are required to do; it is subjectivity appropriated as the object of governance, primarily in industry and education; but – as an object of a putatively neutralpsychological science – it is conceptualized as if this framing power relationwere irrelevant” (Nissen 2019:473).

Marvakis (2019) reflects on this contradiction, pointing to a broader historical dimension in the development of subjectivity by investigating subjectivity as the development of the productive force of individuality. He emphasizes that the (re)organization of society both requires and enables historical forms of individuality. However, this should not be understood as a static situation but rather as a process in which the (re)organization of society and individuality are dialectically intertwined, potentially challenging the dominance of capital. Marvakis highlights this contradiction using a passage from the *Grundrisse*: “Forces of production and social relations –two different sides of the development of the social²³ individual – appear to capitalas mere means, and are merely means for it to produce on its limited foundation. In fact, however, they are the material conditions to blow this foundation skyhigh” (Marx 1857:706).

²³ A note on translation conventions: While Marx's term "gesellschaftliches Individuum" would be more accurately translated as "societal individual," I will adhere to the established convention and use "social individual" instead.

Since subjectivity and individuality are evolving societal products, they must be profitably organized to produce and preserve value in the form of capital, while potential subversive developments of subjectivity need to be restrained. This embodies a contradiction: “The profitable organization of actions by and of real subjects between autonomy and heteronomy constitutes a real contradiction, a real problem for those in power as they organize societal work. Formulated as a question, this contradiction could be: How can individual productivity and creativity be developed *and* exploited (or even developed *to be* exploited)? Or, as a slogan: No *value appreciation* (*Wertschöpfung*) of the productive force ‘individuality,’ without its simultaneous *appreciative evaluation* (*Wertschätzung*)” (Marvakis 2019:30f).

This implies that emancipatory developments cannot be situated outside this contradiction. Thus, Marvakis speaks of the dialectical unit of historical emancipation-alienation regimes: “It is not a question of choice in looking at emancipation or in looking at alienation. All subjects are included and thus are participating/contributing to this “dialectical unit” – even though in particular ways and forms! Nobody is just “emancipated” and/or “alienated” – looking from this point of view at the others!” (Marvakis 2015:140).

The critical question now is how this contradiction, embedded in the societal development of individuality, serves as the material condition to disrupt the foundation on which capital resides. How can this be discovered in psychology? Ute Osterkamp (1975, 1976) suggested reinterpreting and expanding the concept of motivation. “All through the ‘short 20th century’, new concepts of human needs would emerge that recognized individuals as ever more widely self-determining, in order to harness their subjectivity for purposes that were not to be questioned. Finally, the contradiction could be overcome by siding with the subjects and recognizing their need for participation in collective self-determination as true and expansive/generalized agency [verallgemeinerte Handlungsfähigkeit²⁴]; this, for Osterkamp, was the true concept of motivation” (Nissen 2019:473).

Osterkamp's and, following her, Holzkamp's (1983, 2013) depiction of expansive agency provides substantial insights that are grounded in Marxist theory, offering a perspective for overcoming the false necessity of opposed needs. Their methodology calls for using Marxist social theory and reinterpreted psychoanalytic concepts to investigate social problems and contradiction that are reified as psychological issues, which psychologists are commonly expected to address in their work. Building on their insights, I will provide suggestions for therapists in part four. However, their work does not discuss the concept of expansive agency in relation to the broader problems and discussions within Marxist theory and practice (Nissen 2023:126). As Marvakis (1996:65–78) pointed out, this can lead to paternalistic conclusions, like other aforementioned approaches, when addressing rejected political orientations.

²⁴ The original German term ‘verallgemeinerte Handlungsfähigkeit’ can, in some respects, be better translated as “generalizing agency,” emphasizing the development of agency that transcends the false necessities of opposed needs. However, I have chosen to use the terms “expansive agency” and “expanding agency,” as Nissen does, because this translation is more suitable in explaining far-right orientations.

Furthermore, their work did not engage critically with Marxism as a problem of historically changing relations of theory and practice. Consequently, they discuss the emergence of expansive agency only in general terms. They frame it as overcoming the immediacy of restrictions, such as competition, and the personalization and individualization of societal relations, by understanding the societal mediateness of problems in personal agency. However, they do not specify the problem to which the general and underdetermined concept of ‘mediation’ refers (Dreier 2006). Thus, the question remains unanswered as to how motives arise to cultivate substantial and sustained desires for expansive agency. It does not (adequately) discuss the problem of the transition from what is (restrictive agency) to what ought to be (expansive agency). Instead, this leads to the impression that the task is merely to move beyond the immediacy of situational experiences of problems, reinterpreting them within a Marxist framework to understand the societal ‘mediation’. However, the problem “is not a matter of formulating a correct theory and then implementing it in practice” (Cutrone 2010a).

Such an approach overlooks the self-contradictory temporality of bourgeois society dominated by capital as a society stuck in transition, which necessitates, within the societal antagonisms of capitalism, the standpoint of world history to overcome the false necessity of opposed but real needs, that this society produces. Considering my elaboration so far, we can reinterpret Osterkamp’s conception of the problem of motivation as a dialectical reversal, highlighting (but not explicating in her work) the subversive potential of this problem. Instead of asking from the standpoint of capitalism, “How to make people want what they are required to want?”, the reversal asks: “How do motives arise from the standpoint of the working individual for the collective ought (and practice) to move beyond capitalism? - to move beyond the immediacy of the false necessity of opposed but real needs?” This is important, because this immediacy is the most important precondition for right-wing orientations to appear convincing. Therefore, it is crucial for therapists to develop the capacity of imagining potential trajectories how individuals might overcome this immediacy. As I have argued, telling clients or assuming what their ‘true’ interests are is inadequate for this task.

5.2. Radical Needs and Surplus Motivation: Transcending the Limits of Capitalism

Drawing on the insights of Ágnes Heller (1976) and Georg Lukács (1923), I will argue that understanding the development of motives that point beyond the prevailing political culture toward collective self-determination can be advanced by understanding the development of surplus motivation or ‘radical needs’. These needs, produced by the requirements of capital to preserve its value, cannot be satisfied by capital and thus point negatively to the formation of a consciousness that exceeds its bounds.

As a first step, we must consider how reification impacts the consciousness of or orientation in the societal process. Reification, a key concept developed by Lukács (1923) in “History and Class Consciousness”, describes how social relations are transformed into relations between things, extending Marx's analysis of commodity fetishism. This process shapes all aspects of social life, including consciousness, leading to the fragmentation of societal relations and obscuring the underlying societal processes driving capitalism. Consciousness unconscious of reification is fixated on the immediacy of the false necessity of opposed but real needs. Individuals come to perceive societal structures as objective and unchangeable, adopting a passive, contemplative attitude and perceiving social processes as governed by immutable laws akin to natural forces. This breeds a sense of fatalism, inhibiting revolutionary consciousness and cultivating feelings of powerlessness and an incapacity to develop expansive agency. However, recognizing reification embodies the historical potential to move dialectically beyond these restrictions. Lukács capitalism as a totality that produces not only reification but also the consciousness of reification.

Ágnes Heller highlights, like Lukács, the importance of the recognition of reification to transition beyond capitalism, even though she uses the term alienation. Building on these ideas her book “The Theory of Need in Marx” (1976:97) discusses the transition problem as the problem of what is and what ought to be. “But if a system of needs is specific to a given social formation, how can the subjective forces arise which are to overturn this given society?” Heller argues that the cultivation of “radical needs” drives capitalism beyond its limits. Radical needs are produced by the contradictions of capitalism, “thus producing its own gravediggers” (Heller 1976:90). But it is crucial to understand, that these radical needs represent the being of bourgeois society in crisis. Not the ought to move beyond it. But radical needs express this ought negatively: “They are not the ‘embryos’ of a future formation, but ‘members’ of the capitalist formation: it is not the *Being* of radical needs that transcends capitalism but their *satisfaction*. Those individuals for whom ‘the radical needs’ already arise in capitalism are the bearers of the ‘collective Ought’” (Heller 1976:76f). Understood in this way, the negativity of radical needs serves in Heller's conception as the building block of “consciousness exceeding its bounds”, which embodies the collective ought to move beyond capitalism. Before further discussing the concept of radical needs, I will elaborate Heller's and Lukács' solution for the transition problem.

Consciousness exceeding its bounds, which Heller extracts²⁵ from Marx's Grundrisse, is similar to Lukács's (1923) “imputed consciousness,” emphasizing

²⁵ Heller extracts the concept of “consciousness exceeding its bounds” from a specific section of Marx's Grundrisse. I provide the full quote in Heller's translation as it effectively illustrates her line of thought: “The material which it works on [Marx is referring here to subjective “labour capacity”, not to the workers — A.H.] is alien material; the instrument is likewise an alien instrument; its labour appears as a mere accessory to their substance and hence objectifies itself in things not belonging to it. Indeed, living labour itself appears as alien vis-à-vis living labour capacity, whose labour it is, whose own life's expression it is. [...] Labour capacity relates to its labour as to an alien, and if capital were willing to pay it without making it labour it would enter the bargain with pleasure. Thus, labour capacity's own labour is as alien to it — and it really is, as regards its direction etc. — as are material and instrument. Which is why the product then appears to it as a combination of alien material, alien instrument and alien labour — as alien property, [...] the recognition of the products as its own and the judgement that its separation

that true revolutionary consciousness is not a spontaneous outcome of capitalist conditions. Instead, it requires building on the spontaneous experience of reification and contradictions a theoretical understanding of the contradictory totality of capitalism as a conscious recognition of reification. This form of consciousness transcends immediate hardships and recognizes the inherent alienation within capitalist social relations, desiring a fundamental transformation of these relations rather than merely improved conditions within the existing system. Both Heller and Lukács agree that this is not the naturally occurring orientation of the working class. Instead, it represents a potential that needs to be developed through the dialectics of theoretical engagement and practical politics, thereby transforming the working class into the standpoint of the class-conscious proletariat as a historical horizon for emancipation.

The theoretical understanding of the contradictory totality of capitalism cultivates a historical consciousness, possessing the capacity to exceed the immediacy of the false necessity of opposed but real needs. As such it can bridge the “unbridgeable ‘pernicious chasm’ of the present. The human must be able to comprehend the present as a becoming. They can do this by seeing in it the tendencies out of whose dialectical opposition they can make the future. Only when they do this will the present be a process of becoming, that belongs to them” (Lukács 1923:187 my translation).

Both Heller and Lukács argue that simply being conscious of the negative aspects of capitalism is insufficient for emancipation; the working class must develop a “consciousness exceeding its bounds” to transform itself into the proletariat as a collective subject, recognizing the need for fundamental societal restructuring. To unleash this potential is not merely a matter of debating and convincing others to do the ‘right thing’. While political debate is necessary, it is the self-recognition of reified consciousness as reified that drives the development of a consciousness exceeding its bounds. The theoretical understanding of the societal totality that this recognition entails cannot be achieved through pure intellectual will or diligence alone.

Rather, dialectical theory and practice must intensify the class antagonism, and particularly those contradictions that produce radical needs. Only political struggles can manifest these conflicts and contradictions as a historical experience in the societal arrangement of everyday life of the working class. Consequently, capital must react to this historical experience and organize itself politically as the capitalist class. This requisite – the historical experience of the antagonism between the proletarian standpoint and that of capital in everyday life – cannot be replaced by theory alone. But theory is necessary not only to manifest this contradiction politically but also to grasp the problem of capitalism dialectically. This is what is meant by the statement that “consciousness exceeding its bounds” must be developed dialectically through theoretical engagement and practical politics.

from the conditions of its realisation is improper — forcibly imposed — is a consciousness *which exceeds its bounds*, itself the product of the mode of production resting on capital and as much the knell to its doom as, with the slave’s consciousness that he cannot be the property of another, with his consciousness of himself as a person, the existence of slavery becomes a merely artificial, vegetative existence, and ceases to be able to prevail as the basis of production” (Marx 1857:463).

It would be fundamentally wrong and ideologically blinded to equate the revolutionary standpoint of the proletariat with the emancipation achievable within the confines of therapy. However, Heller's and Lukacs' solution for the transition problem is crucial because without it, the concept of radical needs might be misunderstood. Only an adequate comprehension of the development of radical needs in capitalism can clarify how their dissatisfaction within capitalism serves as a negation, pointing to a horizon for overcoming the immediacy of the false necessity of the self-contradiction of capital, producing opposed but real needs.

5.3. The Production and Cultivation of Radical Needs

For advancing the discernment of radical needs, it is essential to understand that needs which are produced and systematically dissatisfied within capitalism are not necessarily also radical needs. Needs that transcend the present due to their systemic dissatisfaction might only point beyond a specific historical regime of capital accumulation, such as Fordism or neoliberalism. Needs are not radical when they do "not transcend the system of needs as a whole, but only the "division" of it" (Heller 1976:97). Considering the preceding discussion on the problem of politics in capitalism, these needs can be understood as trajectories of politics being re-assimilated into the ideology of the third estate.

Some examples can illustrate this: Luc Boltanski and Eve Chiapello (1999) argued that in Fordism, the dissatisfaction of desires for individual and creative self-expression and individual initiative merged into a critique of capitalism that became a subjective force contributing to the renewal of capitalism as neoliberalism. In Marvakis's (2019) analysis, which I mentioned earlier in the context of the contradiction of motivation, this renewal is understood as a shift from a homogeneous (Fordist) mode to a differential (neoliberal) mode of normalizing subjectivity to develop and exploit individuality as a force of production. Additionally, Nancy Fraser's (2019) analysis of the political conflict between the far-right and the left-liberal 'progressive' camp shows how opposed and dissatisfied desires can point to a potential transformation of neoliberalism into either a more authoritarian or more 'progressive' neoliberal regime of capital accumulation.

Furthermore, transcending the "division" of the system of needs does not even necessarily mean moving beyond a specific historical formation of capitalism. It can also imply a subtle shift from more to less or vice versa irresponsible capitalist state dictatorship, such as replacing one government with another that serves the needs of a different capitalists. This shift will represent the discontents of a different section of the working class by prioritizing certain interests among the conflicting interests in social investment in capital. This phenomenon can be observed even at the municipal level, where conflicting desires might arise over priorities like cars versus cycling in urban planning, supporting intercity versus intracity commuters, or addressing the needs of the urban versus rural working class in metropolitan areas. The associated attempts

to preserve the value of capital are interconnected with the political representation of opposed needs and discontents of certain sections of the working class. While these discontents do not themselves represent radical needs, they might be indirectly connected to radical needs.

For needs to be radical, they must have the historical character that they could not previously have been satisfied by bourgeois society, which is dominated by the self-contradiction of capital. This points to proletarianization: "The need of the slave to be a free man is not a new need, because the society that enslaves him is a society of free men. The bourgeoisie's need to take political power is likewise not a new need; it is simply a demand for the satisfaction of a need which is already available to others, and for the elimination of the obstacles to this satisfaction. The radical needs of the working class created by capitalism are, however, different by definition. Their nature is such that they cannot previously have been satisfied in the given society, either by the bourgeoisie or by the proletariat" (Heller 1976:97). As such, considering the problem of politics in capitalism, radical needs can be seen as potential trajectories for politics moving beyond the ideology of the third estate.

Thus, only the radical needs cultivate through their negativity the collective ought, "in the interests of satisfying them, to bring about a social formation which is *radically*, 'from the root', different from the previous one, a society in which the radically new system of needs will be different from all earlier ones" (Heller 1976:98). This means that although capitalism necessarily produces its gravediggers, transcending capitalism is not a natural law but a potential embodied by the subjective force of radical needs. This clarifies that the "class interest" is not the motive that points beyond capitalism; rather, "the true motive, free from fetishism, is represented by the 'radical needs' of [mostly but not exclusively] the working class" (Heller 1976:60), cultivating the collective ought represented by the consciousness exceeding its bounds.

These radical needs are produced by the contradictions that arise out of the self-contradiction of capital. "The idea that radical needs are in some sense constituted from labour runs like a thread through Marx's work: either because surplus labour (performed for its own sake) becomes need; or because of the increase in free time, which gives rise to radical needs (and to the need for still more free time); or because of the need for universality which, having arisen in the form of mass production, cannot be satisfied within capitalism" (Heller 1976:90f). Heller – making no claim to be exhaustive – identifies three key contradictions from Marx's writings that drive this process (Heller 1976:81ff):

1. The 'contradiction of freedom and necessity': While capitalism offers the illusion of freedom and equality through commodity production and wage labor, individuals are ultimately subordinated to the economic system's quasi-natural necessity, generating alienation and the false necessity of opposed but real needs.
2. The 'contradiction of necessity and chance': The inherent unpredictability and uncertainty of capitalism further fuel the consciousness of alienation, as individuals recognize their livelihood is subject to uncontrollable forces.
3. The 'contradiction of causality and teleology': This contradiction between individual intentions and systemic outcomes leads to a recognition of the alienated nature of

societal relations in capitalism. Workers invest in capital hoping to produce goods for their subsistence, but increased productivity results in technologies that primarily generate surplus value. Capitalists intend to make a profit, but the inevitable result of increased productivity is the lowering of profit margins.

Additionally, Heller highlights the contradiction between societal wealth and societal impoverishment, explaining how capitalism constantly creates new desires, especially in the working class, which are impoverished by the needs of capital. These desires can only be temporarily satisfied during periods of expanded societal consumption, creating a radical need for universality. Ishay Landa (2018) makes a similar argument, noting that Marx viewed the expansion of needs entailed by capitalism favorably but saw capitalism as a system that subjugates use-value to the imperatives of profit accumulation, thereby limiting and constraining mass consumption. This drives the cultivation of radical needs that inherently point beyond capitalism.

It is crucial not to mistake radical needs as isolated entities. Radical needs help us understand motivational trajectories for overcoming the seemingly natural immediacy of capitalism. Needs, whether radical or not, do not exist in a vacuum; they are interrelated with other needs and do not emerge passively from conditions. Instead, needs, especially those that transcend the present, are always cultivated as the desire to expand agency by participating in social practices. Therapy is just one instance of such practices. This implies that radical needs are not simply identifiable as present or absent because the cultivation of needs is a social (and not individual) practice. Therefore, radical needs can always be expressed through other needs, particularly those transcending the present. Within limitations, these needs can be expanded by interpreting and cultivating them as radical needs by fostering a conscious recognition of their emergence from contradictions embedded in everyday life, that produce radical needs. This process is important for therapy. In part four, I will provide brief discussion of this complex process. However, a comprehensive discussion would exceed the scope of this article (see: Nissen 2023).

5.4. The Embodiment of Radical Needs in the Social Individual

To advance my argument and conclude the section on radical needs, I will discuss another concept that Heller draws from Marx's *Grundrisse*, the 'development of the social individual'²⁶. This concept deepens our understanding of the connection between societal contradictions and the emergence of radical needs that cultivate the desire to expand agency. Heller, much like Landa (2019) in his analysis of desires for emancipation emerging from 19th-century mass production, argues that the development of the social individual represents the foundation for an emancipation that moves beyond the bourgeois horizon. It embodies the radical "need for universality which, having arisen in the form of mass production, cannot be satisfied within capitalism" (Heller 1976:91). The

²⁶ While Marx's term "gesellschaftliches Individuum" would be more accurately translated as "societal individual," I will adhere to the established convention and use "social individual" instead.

emergence of the social individual embodies a political horizon capable of redefining the societal wealth, a transformation only possible through the historical overcoming of capitalism by appropriating capital's potential for freedom.

The emancipatory horizon of the social individual transforms bourgeois utopias of freedom and universality. However, it is insufficient to view the social individual as realizing the promises of bourgeois values undermined by capitalism. Radical needs embody their emancipatory potential only in their negativity, having not been satisfied in the given society. Bourgeois values became obsolete when bourgeois society entered crisis, and radical needs are historically newer, emerging only through this crisis. Thus, the social individual's utopia transcends the contradiction between bourgeois norms and industrial production, embodying the potential to revise the bourgeois measurement of societal wealth.

The universality expressed in the development of the social individual points to the general and free development of social relations, including the transgression of institutionalized social relations like family and gender relations. It embodies the potential to move beyond the immediacy of false but real needs, illustrated by the condition that free time in capitalism is only available for some at the expense of appropriating others' labor. Therefore, the concept of the social individual is closely connected to the radical need for free disposable time.

Understanding this requires revisiting Lukács's analysis of labor-time and reification. It encapsulates all the mentioned contradictions that produce radical needs. In capitalism, time is quantified as the commodity of labor-time. For capitalists, labor-time is purely quantitative, treated as a resource to be controlled and exploited. However, labor-time is not only the determining form of the commodity of labor power, that the worker sells, but of the workers' "existence as subject, as human being" (Lukács 1923:160). But this entails, that for the worker every quantitative change in labor-time holds a qualitative significance: "The quantitative differences in exploitation which appear to the capitalist in the form of quantitative determinantsof the objects of theircalculation, must appear to the worker as thedecisive, qualitative categories of the workers whole physical, mental andmoral existence" (Lukács 1923:159).

This experience of time as "the place of human development" (Marx 1865:144) bears the potential for workers to become conscious of alienation and reification, understanding how the free and disposable time of capitalists depends on their labor-time, thus restricting their free time. This realization may lead workers to become conscious of "the contradiction between the need to develop their personality to sell their labor-power and labor-time and the 'accidental' character of their subordination to [the false necessity of] thedivision of labor" (Heller 1976:90).

Marx emphasized in *Capital vol. 3* against naive conceptions of freedom that the subordination to the division of labor can only be overcome through the dialectics of the realm of necessity and the realm of freedom. He highlighted how the social individual, necessarily cultivated by capital, produces the historic potential for freedom:

In fact, the realm of freedom actually begins only where labor, determined by necessity and mundane considerations, ceases. Freedom in this field can only consist in socialized man, the associated producers, rationally regulating their interchange with Nature, bringing it under their common control, instead of being ruled by it as by the blind forces of Nature [or society reified as nature or natural law]; and achieving this with the least expenditure of energy and under conditions most favorable to, and worthy of, their human nature. But it nonetheless still remains a realm of necessity. Beyond it begins that development of human energy which is an end in itself, the true realm of freedom, which, however, can blossom forth only with this realm of necessity as its basis. The shortening of the working day is its basic prerequisite (Marx 1894:828).

Heller, similarly to Cutrone, emphasizes that it is not the class struggle itself, but rather its manifestations of contradictions that hold the true potential for emancipation, reaching beyond the limits of capitalism: “While the wage struggle, accordingly to Marx, is conducted for the particular interests of the proletariat, the struggle for freetime transcends particular interests and contains in principle ‘that which conforms to the needs of the species’. [...] When related to the need for free time, the character of “radical needs” is brought out in a particularly striking manner: it is produced by capitalism itself, by its contradictory character, and thus belongs to the very functioning of capitalism. (The reduction of labour time compels capitalists to increase their productivity constantly, and to give priority to relative rather than absolute surplus value; this basically represents a specific peculiarity of the capitalist production of surplus value.) At the same time, need itself mobilises the working class into transcending capitalism” (Heller 1976:91).

It is crucial to understand that the concept of the social individual goes beyond merely “seizing the means of production.” In his *Theories of Surplus Value Vol. II*, Marx writes that in capitalism the “development of the capacities of the human species take place at the cost of the majority of the human individuals and even classes, in the end it breakthrough this contradiction and coincides with the development of the individual” (Marx 1863:118). Heller clarifies that this process is not identical to “the ‘centralisation of the means of production’ and the ‘socialisation of labour’ [...] from the first volume of *Capital* (Heller 1976:84). Instead, the development of the social individual refers to a broader conception of appropriating capital's potential for freedom to develop the capacities of the human species. This is not “a mere consequence of the centralisation of the means of production and the socialisation of labour” (Heller 1976:84).

The social individual, as an embodiment of radical needs, reflects the historic potential of society to liberate itself from the restraining needs of capital, unleashing the free and universal development of the capacities of the human species and the pursuit of higher activities, made possible by free disposable time. This conception of wealth stands in stark contrast to the bourgeois focus on labor-time and capital's relentless pursuit of surplus value. In full agreement with Marx, Heller argues that this possibility is already foreshadowed within the structure of capital itself as an immediate historical potential:

Marx writes in his 'Grundrisse' that "the historic destiny (of capital) is fulfilled as soon as [...] there has been such a development of needs that surplus labour above and beyond necessity has itself become a general need arising out of individual needs themselves [...] hence where labour in which a human being does what a thing could do has ceased" (Marx 1857:325).

These developments would only be realizable in a future society that has abolished the wage-system and the law of value. Let us remember that the constant increase in productivity, which is needed to preserve the value of capital, also leads to the cheapening of labor, making labor less important for production, thus creating the potential for free, disposable time. However, this potential is not realized under capitalism but leads to proletarianization and impoverishment. Therefore, the contradiction between societal wealth and impoverishment holds a true potential for transforming and revising the bourgeois conception of wealth.

Heller argues, without delving into the specifics of her detailed discussion of Marx, that capital drives the development of subjective capacities but at the same time, this is restrained by the law of value. Capital also drives the development of disposable time, but only for some, by appropriating the labor-power and labor-time of others. Since in bourgeois society labor is seen as the sole source and value of wealth, the free development of capacities and disposable free time cannot appear as societal wealth. Nevertheless, capital drives the production of such, both cultivating and frustrating a different system of needs, embodied by the social individual, that serves in its negativity as the potential gravedigger of capital's dominance:

As soon as labour in the direct form has ceased to be the great well-spring of wealth, labourtime ceases and must cease to be its measure, and hence exchangevalue (must cease to be the measure) of use value. The surpluslabour of the mass has ceased to be the condition for the development of general wealth, just as the non -labour of the few, for thedevelopment of the general powers of the human head. With that,production based on exchange value breaks down, and thedirect, material production process is stripped of the form ofopenury and antithesis. The free development of individualities, and hence not the reduction of necessary labour time so as toposit surplus labour, but rather the general reduction of thenecessary labour of society to a minimum, which then correspondsto the artistic, scientific etc. development of the individuals in thetime set free, and with the means created, for all of them (Marx 1857:705f).

Thus, the contradiction of capitalism harbors its own overcoming, giving rise to the social individual, which represents a different system of needs capable of revising the bourgeois measure of societal wealth, as foreshadowed in the production of radical needs. In the next part, I will describe from a historical perspective how the concept of the social individual can be understood as an emancipatory horizon, embodying a utopia of freedom that emerged from the crisis of the bourgeois utopia of the free individual.

Part Three

Chapter 6: Historical Foundations of Today's Emancipatory Notions. The Freedom Utopias of Individuality and the problem of capitalism

6.1. Self-Consciousness of Bourgeois Society – The Utopia of Bourgeois Individuality

The basic idea I want to convey is that modern notions of emancipation emerged during the Enlightenment (Stapelfeldt 2014:289–324), but this development was only possible through the prior historical evolution of bourgeois society that preceded the Enlightenment (Spencer 2013). The Enlightenment marks the period when bourgeois society attained historical self-consciousness, expressed through historical theory-practice relations (Cutrone 2013a; Marcuse 1941). This newfound self-awareness found its prominent and assertive political articulation in Emmanuel Joseph Sieyès's pamphlet "What Is the Third Estate?" (1789), which played a crucial role in initiating the French Revolution by suggesting how the Estates General of 1789 in Paris should be constituted. Sieyès declared, "What is the Third Estate? Everything. What has it been hitherto in the political order? Nothing. What does it desire to be? Something".

This era introduced ideas such as the capacity of individuals to develop themselves to attain maturity, which I refer to as the bourgeois utopia of individuality, which embodies the importance of dialogue, self-criticism, and autonomy. Philosophically, this was famously expressed in Kant's essay "What is Enlightenment?" (1784a), where he defined enlightenment not as a period but as an emancipatory process. Kant described this process as humans developing their subjective faculties to "emergence from [...] self-imposed immaturity. Immaturity is the inability to use one's understanding without guidance from another. This immaturity is self-imposed when its cause lies not in lack of understanding, but in lack of resolve and courage to use it without guidance from another." Thus, Kant articulated a call to emancipation: "The guardians who have so benevolently taken over the supervision of men have carefully seen to it that the far greatest part of them (including the entire fair sex) regard taking the step to maturity as very dangerous, not to mention difficult."

In this perspective, successful living involves not submitting to authorities and traditions but developing a critical understanding of the world and questioning traditional authorities. For instance, for women today, this perspective might mean aspiring to a self-determined life by criticizing and resisting patriarchal norms rather than conforming to submissive roles. This also means actively participating in shaping social contexts rather than withdrawing into private life. This was prominently expressed by the impact of revolutionary and moderate bourgeois women in the French Revolution.

Any adequate treatment of the Enlightenment and bourgeois revolutions would necessitate an extensive discussion on how women shaped this history as active subjects. However, a thorough exploration of this topic lies beyond the scope of this article, as argued in the introduction. Nonetheless, it would be

remiss not to acknowledge the world-historical influence of several bourgeois radical women of the era, whose legacy continues to shape the cultural imagination of emancipation to this day.

Anne Louise Germaine de Staël-Holstein exemplified the role of women as active subjects in the French Revolution, as her presence at critical events such as the Estates General of 1789 and the Declaration of the Rights of Man and of the Citizen in the same year highlighted her engagement in political discourse despite not holding revolutionary standpoints. On the more revolutionary side, it is crucial to mention the Women's March on Versailles, also known as the October March of 1789, which was one of the earliest and most significant events of the French Revolution. Besides being revolutionaries, women played significant roles as spies, historical commentators, salonnières, playwrights, agents provocateurs, philosophers, intellectuals, abolitionists, and writers. They created and shaped institutions such as the first women-only organization in French history, the “Société patriotique et de bienfaisance des Amies de la Vérité” and the “Society of Revolutionary Republican Women,” where the most radical women organized as revolutionaries.

Among these revolutionaries were Theroigne de Mericourt, a well-known agent provocateur who tried to expand the revolution beyond France; Louise-Félicité de Kéralio, who edited the 14-volume “Collection of the Best French Works Written by Women” (1789); and Etta Palm d'Aelders, who presented her “Discourse on the Injustice of the Laws in Favor of Men at the Expense of Women” to the French National Convention on December 30, 1790. The most well-known of them today is probably Olympe de Gouges, who wrote the “Declaration of the Rights of Woman and of the Female Citizen” (1791) and was executed by guillotine in 1793.

However, not all revolutionary women advocated for women's rights. Marie-Jeanne “Manon” Roland de la Platière, for instance, was actively involved in the revolutionary process but argued, contrary to her own conduct of life, that women should play a very modest role in public and political life.

The Enlightenment also brought the discovery of history (Cutrone 2013a), shifting the view of society from a divine order to a human-made, historical process. This shift was famously expressed by Hegel (1837) in his lectures of 1822, 1828, and 1830 “On the Philosophy of World History”:

World history is the progress of the consciousness of freedom – a progress whose necessity we have to investigate. [...] But in contemplating history as the slaughter-bench at which the happiness of peoples, the wisdom of states, and the virtue of individuals have been sacrificed, a question necessarily arises: To what principle, to what final purpose, have these monstrous sacrifices been offered? [...] The Orientals knew only that *one* is free, the Greeks and Romans that some are free, while we [moderns] know that all men absolutely, that is, as men, are free. [...] Freedom is itself its own object of attainment and the sole purpose of Spirit. It is the ultimate purpose toward which all world history has continually aimed. To this end all the sacrifices have been offered on the vast altar of the earth throughout the long lapse of ages.

This historical shift from viewing society as divinely ordained to recognizing it as a human-made process with the potential for freedom implied that rules should only be followed if they are rationally justified and collectively agreed upon. Consequently, resistance against all forms of irrational and authoritarian rule became a moral imperative. Concepts such as self-determination, social contract, and democracy emerged, advocating for a society that ensures the universality of individual freedom.

This understanding of freedom also opposed the state, from which bourgeois civil and political rights had to be protected. Today, it is commonly accepted that the state protects and grants rights, but to the bourgeois radicals of the Enlightenment, this would be seen as an outrageous reversal of facts. This was articulated as the right of revolution in many prominent writings of bourgeois radicals, including John Locke's (1689b) "Two Treatises of Government", Jean-Jacques Rousseau's (1755) "On the Origin of Inequality", Immanuel Kant's (1797) "Metaphysics of Morals", John Stuart Mill's (1859) "On Liberty". In addition, imagine the liberation from feudal conditions during bourgeois revolutions, which involved fighting against the feudal state. This conception of freedom implies the development of a world society as Kant (1784b) famously argued in his, "Idea for a Universal History with a Cosmopolitan Purpose". These notions of freedom also mean recognizing oneself in others as the basis for living together, rejecting natural orders. Consider for example "the categorical imperative".

The bourgeois conception of emancipation envisions a self-regulating society based on free trade and production relations, inherently rejecting slavery (Spencer 2013). This perspective is foundational for modern notions of emancipation (Stapelfeldt 2014). Although Enlightenment thinkers like Kant held racist and sexist prejudices, their commitment to criticism and self-criticism inherently provided a potential pathway for overcoming these biases in the historical process. This notion of criticism is not abstract but grounded in social relations functioning self-regulatingly, as free trade and production relations.

A crucial point here is the concept of property for effective societal participation (Spencer 2013). Property was seen as a fundamental natural right, as articulated by thinkers like John Locke (1689b) in "Two Treatises of government". The primary natural right was self-ownership—the ownership of one's labor and its products. Labor was thus perceived as a means of emancipation, with everyone free to generate wealth through their labor. Bourgeois radicals highly regarded work, as exemplified by Adam Smith's (1776) "Wealth of Nations". This marked a genuinely modern development. That was grasped at that time. A well known example is Benjamin Constant's (1819) reflection "The Liberty of the Ancients Compared with that of the Moderns".

To grasp the historical shift, contrast these ideas with pre-French Revolution aristocracy or ancient Greek citizenship. Aristocrats displayed their wealth as birthrights, not earned through labor, while in ancient Greece, free citizens, equated with being male, were distinguished by their freedom from labor, reserved for slaves. This contrasts sharply with modern bourgeois ideals,

where influential individuals often emphasize having worked for their wealth, justifying their entitlement—a key aspect of modernity.

In the emancipation concepts of the bourgeois radicals during the Enlightenment, the principle was that everyone could achieve wealth through their labor (considering the ideas of Kant, Locke, and especially Adam Smith). This historical horizon of emancipation indeed functioned within bourgeois society—important to note, this discussion pertains to the period before the development of industrial capitalism. Labor operated as a means of emancipation from traditional relationships. Imagine the development of cities: individuals living in rural, patriarchal family structures. Individuals could attain greater freedom by moving to the city and pursuing a profession—primarily referring to male emancipation here.

However, the emergence of industrial capitalism introduced significant contradictions between bourgeois rights and societal relations, and the new industrial relations of production, leading bourgeois society into crisis. These contradictions would ultimately challenge the self-regulating notion of bourgeois society and its ideals of emancipation, paving the way for new social dynamics and tensions. These dynamics and tensions would be further explored and critiqued by the emergence of the workers' movement and its diverse historical theory-practice relations. I will explain this in the next section

6.2. The Crisis of the Utopia of Bourgeois Individuality and the Industrial Revolution

The utopia of bourgeois individuality and its associated emancipation concepts failed politically. I will explain this in three points: 1. The political failure of bourgeois emancipation concepts in the 1848/49 revolutions, followed by the subsequent crisis in the bourgeois conception of emancipation. 2. The political failure was both rooted in and actively expressed the historical emergence of a new, unstable societal condition. Bourgeois society entered a crisis due to the contradiction between bourgeois rights (civil rights) and societal relations on one hand, and the industrial relations of production on the other. 3. Out of this crisis and its underlying contradiction, however, emerged a new emancipation perspective: The utopia of the social individual.

Firstly, these emancipation concepts encountered the 1848/49 revolutions, which from the perspective of bourgeois radicals, failed. The bourgeois radicals, contrary to their hopes for the development of an emancipated world society, faced the development of new authoritarian state forms post-1848, which had social support bases where parts of the aristocracy aligned with population segments that should have had an interest in emancipation (according to Enlightenment thinkers). Symbolic of this is the bloody suppression of the June uprising and the subsequent election of Louis Bonaparte, who declared himself Emperor, Napoleon III, in 1852 (for a nuanced assessment of the revolutions from a contemporary perspective: Clark 2023; for the historical experience of the bourgeois radicals see: Davidson 2012; Landa 2019).

This constellation is referred to in Marxist literature as Bonapartism. Marx, as a contemporary, provided an impressive analysis in his work 'The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte'. Here, we can find the historical starting point of the new right. The old (mostly) aristocratic right, which opposed the French Revolution, had no interest in developing or involving a social base for their politics. But with the development of democracy, having a social base became important to implement reactionary ideas. The 'new', modern right emerged out of this societal situation (Saul 2015; Saul et al. 2015)

Secondly, the social basis for the failure of these concepts is the crisis of bourgeois rights (civil rights) and the conditions of bourgeois society during industrialization (Cutrone 2024). Essentially, work became less important for societal production. Humans became appendages to machines, as Marx put it. Workers could no longer appropriate the products of their labor because they did not own the machines, the means of production, which played a crucial role in the production of social wealth. This had implications for social participation. The development of productive forces, such as technologies and machines, accelerated the societal production of wealth. However, it no longer directly correlated with the labor one invested. This changed the position in the production process for those who did not own means of production as well as for emerging capitalists: The latter were increasingly freed from the need to participate in the production of products through their own labor. In contrast, workers, including children and women, were forced to sell their labor power as appendages to machines to survive. They could not own anything but their labor power. This explains the 'normal' existential threat I mentioned earlier. Consequently, wealth was concentrated in the hands of a few, while the masses could not access it. Marx described this as the dominance of past, dead labor over present, living labor. Past dead labor ultimately represents capital (consider machines, which also need to be produced through labor). Here, the self-regulation of bourgeois society, the free trade and production relations, came into crisis. Only in this crisis did the modern proletariat and capital emerge. Ultimately, they represent two sides of the same coin: labor, whose products start to span a reified and alienated world. This world is the crisis of bourgeois society. Or in short, capitalism.

Another related point is the cyclical devaluation of labor power in crises, affecting both living labor and the produced wealth. In the latter regard, there were several such crises in the 1840s, representing the first collective experience of such crises. Regarding living labor: You may be familiar with the term de-skilling or de-professionalization. This means that as automation eliminates jobs, people who were, for example, tailors or many women who produced textiles at home suddenly become unskilled workers and mere appendages to machines. This phenomenon of cyclical mass unemployment devalues people and their bourgeois rights (consider the natural right to self-ownership and the right to the products of one's labor). I say 'devalues' to distinguish the failure of bourgeois emancipation concepts, based on these rights, from the political failure I mentioned earlier. I hope this brief sketch of the new social situation clarifies how capitalism cyclically exacerbates the 'normal' existential threat.

This new situation, its contradictions, and the crisis posed a challenge to the bourgeois perspective of liberation. It also entered into crisis, understood as the crisis of bourgeois political orientations as historical theory-practice relations. Historian T.J. Clark (1973) exemplifies this in his analysis of the painting 'Liberty Leading the People' by Eugène Delacroix. This painting depicts the last successful bourgeois revolution of 1830 in France. Delacroix was reputed to be 'the' painter of political upheavals in 1848. His works embodied the political culture. Consequently, he attempted and was commissioned to depict the 1848 revolution but failed. This episode symbolically represents the crisis of the bourgeois emancipation perspective. It could no longer represent the new situation, thereby failing to advance the revolution.

Historian Neil Davidson (2012) traces how this crisis shaped the liberal self-understanding post-1848. These discussions serve as a transition to the next section. The period following 1848 marked a significant shift in the political self-understanding of liberals. Prior to this, figures like Guizot envisioned a liberalism focused on constitutional limits on monarchical power and extending the franchise to the bourgeoisie. This vision was challenged by the 1848 revolutions, which exposed the growing fear of mass movements and the increasingly conservative nature of liberal thought. Before 1848, liberals saw themselves as advocates for progress and rationality, pushing for gradual reform and constitutional governance. They sought to limit the power of absolutist monarchs and extend political participation to the educated and propertied classes. Guizot's dismissal of "abstract principle" and "fanciful theory" demonstrates this commitment to a pragmatic, incremental approach to political change. The 1848 revolutions, however, profoundly shook this self-understanding. The specter of social unrest and the demands for more radical change, particularly from the burgeoning working class, led many liberals to retreat from their earlier embrace of reform. They began to see stability and order as paramount, fearing that further concessions to popular demands would lead to chaos and undermine the existing social order. Guizot's own reconsideration of his positions, prompted by the 1848 revolution, exemplifies this shift. His post-1848 writings abandon his earlier emphasis on social explanations for political change, instead focusing on a narrower conception of political events, devoid of deeper social causes.

This reflects a broader trend among liberals who, after 1848, began to downplay the significance of social forces in shaping political realities. This shift in liberal self-understanding reveals the inherent tensions and contradictions within liberalism itself. While advocating for progress and individual liberties, liberals also sought to maintain existing power structures and often resisted more radical demands for social transformation. The events of 1848 exposed this underlying conservatism, compelling liberals to recalibrate their political vision in a world increasingly shaped by anxieties about social stability and the rising power of the working class. Ishay Landa (2009, 2019) refers to this as the 'liberal split' in his books "The Apprentice's Sorcerer" and "Fascism and the Masses". This split forced liberals to either radicalize and align themselves with certain strains of the workers' movement to expand and transform their vision for

emancipation or to seek alignment with the new reactionary movements, thereby contributing to the emergence of modern conservatism and the far right.

I have described how this new situation, symbolized by the events of 1848, its contradictions, and the crisis posed a challenge to the bourgeois perspective of liberation. However, this also brought forth new political forms and utopias expressed in new political orientations, i.e., new historical theory-practice relations emerged as subjective moments of the social process. The proletariat, as a reaction to this new situation, dialectically embodied a new utopia. As a subjective moment in the social process, it represents the social negativity, for the proletariat is a contradiction that should not exist in bourgeois society as it embodies the ‘disenfranchised’ or ‘dispossessed’ condition and the social devaluation of labor (Cutrone 2024). As a negative moment, it points beyond the capitalist dynamic. Simultaneously, recalling the Marxist dialectical critique, it represents both the anticipation of a utopian future and the greatest potential for capitalism’s renewal during crises, thereby transforming its contradictions into new forms and projecting them into the future.

6.3. The Utopia of the Social Individual

Next, I will discuss how the societal contradictions that arose with industrialization and the resulting crises have given rise to a new emancipation perspective, forming a new horizon for transforming society. This perspective is the utopia of the social individual²⁷, which I have already outlined theoretically in section 2. For those who skipped this section, I will provide a brief description that does not heavily rely on theory. Please note that this overview will gloss over important complexities and may lack sufficient context to fully understand the historical quotes used.

This term comes from Marx’s “Grundrisse” (1857). Ishay Landa contrasts this term in his book “Fascism and the Masses” with the reactionary standpoints that also developed during this period. In his essay “Marxism and Philosophy”, Karl Korsch (1923) uses a similar term, the term “Sozietät” (societal association), to express the emancipatory character of those historical theory-practice relations that have most clearly been expressed by the emergence of the proletariat as a class. He contrasts this with the historical theory-practice relations that characterize the bourgeois class: Marx “did not merely criticize the inherited political economy of the bourgeois class *negatively*, but also *positively*, by opposing the ‘political economy of property’ with the ‘political economy of the working class’ In the national economy of the bourgeois propertied class, even theoretically, private property reigns over the entire social wealth, the accumulated dead labor of the past over the present living labor. In the political economy of the proletariat, *and thus also in its ‘theoretical expression’*, the economic system of Marxism, ‘Sozietät’, the society, reigns over its entire product, that is, living labor over accumulated dead labor or ‘capital’. According

²⁷ While Marx’s term “gesellschaftliches Individuum” would be more accurately translated as “societal individual,” I will adhere to the established convention and use “social individual” instead.

to Marx's insight, this is the pivotal point around which the impending revolution of the world must revolve; theoretically, therefore, a 'radical', that is, according to Marx, a 'grasping the root of the matter' confrontation between the bourgeois philosophy and science and the new ideas of the proletarian class rising to its liberation must revolve".

One central effect of the crisis that emerged from the contradiction between bourgeois social relations and capitalist production relations was that work ceased to be the central means of emancipation. The reduction of necessary labor by the capitalist development of productive forces diminished the importance of work for social reproduction. Consequently, the new conception of emancipation recognized the social reduction of labor time as a prerequisite for freedom. This dynamic unleashed by industrialization also created new forms of wealth, technologies, skills, and knowledge.

A significant aspect of these new productive forces is the constant development and renewal of social relationships and the associated subjectivity necessitated by the inherent instability of capitalist development. This can be seen in how, today, one no longer has a job for life and must constantly acquire new skills. The earlier depiction of the crisis in bourgeois society highlighted the destructive side of this process, expressed through de-skilling or de-professionalization, posing an existential threat. However, within this contradiction lies emancipatory potential. We continually enter into new cooperations with previously unknown individuals, undermining social differences that racism, sexism, and other forms of discrimination thrive on, such as gendered, traditional, and nationalist notions of humanity. Ishay Landa (2019) has described this as the emancipatory potential of the massification of society.

Only in capitalism can humanity become aware of its societal nature—or more precisely, the historical development of capital embodies the potential for humanity to become conscious of its societal nature. We can consider the factory system, where goods are produced through extensive cooperative relationships. Or think of commodities, in which the cooperation needed to produce them is objectified. Commodities of everyday life such as food and clothes are produced in global value chains, representing an incredible cooperative achievement despite being founded on exploitation. My point is that everyday objects of use constitute crystallized cooperation.

As another example we can consider the development of space travel in the 20th century. Around 400,000 people were involved in the first moon landing. The cooperation necessary to make this possible embodies a potential for liberation. Marx writes, "The productive forces and social relations—both different sides of the development of the social individual—appear to capital only as means, and are only means for it to produce on its narrow foundation. But in fact, they are the material conditions to blow this foundation sky-high" (Marx 1857:602). From this, one can conclude the necessity of the democratic reappropriation of the social production of wealth.

This perspective has also been further developed in feminist terms. Juliet Mitchell (1966), in "Women: The Longest Revolution", applied this framework to feminist emancipation. Similarly, John D'Emilio (1983) argued from a queer

perspective in his essay “Gay Identity and Capitalism.” Capitalism continuously produces new ways of life that represent new forms of freedom but simultaneously limits their full development due to its inherent conditions. Nevertheless, capitalism must continually reproduce this potential for liberation. This insight is eloquently captured in a well-known quote from Marx in the “Grundrisse” (Marx 1857:487f):

Thus the old [=ancient] view, in which the human being appears as the aim of production, regardless of his limited national, religious, political character, seems to be very lofty when contrasted to the modern world, where production appears as the aim of mankind and wealth as the aim of production. In fact, however, when the limited bourgeois form is stripped away, what is wealth other than the universality of individual needs, capacities, pleasures, productive forces etc., created through universal exchange? The full development of human mastery over the forces of nature, those of so-called nature as well as of humanity's own nature? The absolute working-out of his creative potentialities, with no presupposition other than the previous historic development, which makes this totality of development, i.e. the development of all human powers as such the end in itself, not as measured on a predetermined yardstick? Where he does not reproduce himself in one specificity, but produces his totality? Strives not to remain something he has become, but is in the absolute movement of becoming?

The Utopia of the Social Individual in Contemporary Political Culture

The liberation perspective embodied in the utopia of the social individual has largely disappeared from contemporary political imagination—even within oppositional leftist circles. It has been supplanted by the notion that socialism consists in the expansion of the public sector within capitalism. Horkheimer (Horkheimer 1942, 1943) critiqued this standpoint, which reappropriates measures of value of societal wealth (including subjective command over wealth) that have been made obsolete by societal development, in his essays “The Authoritarian State” and “On the Sociology of Class Relations”. Consequently, from this perspective, modern leftist notions are not significantly different from liberal or right-wing views, which focus on managing capitalism rather than fundamentally questioning and transforming its underlying structures, thereby unleashing the implicit emancipatory potential.

The utopia of the social individual has been replaced by a fixation on the immediacy of reified conditions, where individuals confront unwanted political developments in an alienated manner. By Leszek Kołakowski (1969) definition is hardly any political left remaining today. He interprets 'left' and 'right' not sociologically as is commonly done – i.e., not as a milieu or class – but negatively, as a negation of the present, embodying a concrete utopia of freedom (see Bloch 1959). This necessitates overcoming the historicity embedded in the prevailing political culture, including the culture of the oppositional left.

In Kołakowski's perspective, the left in capitalism represents the subjective moment driving the social process forward in an emancipatory way, while the

right embodies historical inertia. This does not imply that the right is incapable of instigating change. Indeed, it can bring about change with incredible brutality and barbarism, as seen in fascist political practices or imperialist wars. However, such right-wing revolutions are merely political revolutions and not fundamental social revolutions that consciously realize the emancipatory tendencies inherent in societal conditions.

For the political left to be meaningful in Kołakowski's sense, it must transcend the immediacy of the present, including the prevailing historicity of political culture. Lukács, in "History and Class Consciousness" (Lukács 1923:187), states: "The concrete here and now, dissolved into a process, is no longer a fleeting, ungraspable moment, the vanishing immediacy, but the moment of the deepest and most widespread mediation, the moment of decision, the moment of the birth of the new. As long as man contemplates his interest in a backward-looking way – be it in the past or the future – both are reified into a foreign being, and between subject and object lies the insurmountable 'harmful space' of the present. Only when man is capable of grasping the present as becoming, recognizing in it those tendencies from whose dialectical opposition he is capable of creating the future, does the present, the present as becoming, become his present".

6.4. The Far-Right as Negation of the Utopia of the Social Individual

I will now proceed to explain how right-wing radicalism can be seen as a negation of the utopia of the social individual. This insight is derived from the works of Ishay Landa, particularly "Fascism and the Masses," and Ute Osterkamp. The crisis of bourgeois society that emerged during industrialization has, in a sense, placed a price tag on the categorical imperative. Moral and emancipatory behavior is no longer easily affordable and can sometimes be so costly that it threatens one's very existence.

Consider the example of petty crime due to poverty. In such cases, individuals take from others, violating bourgeois rights, despite not wanting their own possessions taken. The violation of the categorical imperative is thus justified by poverty. These precarious conditions foster demoralization, rooted in the historical experience of existential threats posed by unemployment and social crises. By threat, I refer not to direct physical danger but to the threat to one's individual form of existence and lifestyle.

For example, in my work in psychiatry, I encountered small business owners and bar operators who suddenly became unemployed due to COVID-19 restrictions. Their businesses relied on a continuous flow of customers, which was no longer possible. Consequently, their individual forms of existence were realistically threatened or destroyed.

The psychological foundation of the power, potency, and persuasiveness of right-wing orientations lies not in the actual experience of existential threat but in the anticipation of such threats and the anticipated loss of agency. For instance, racist discourses often emphasize that migrants will take away "our" wealth,

cultivating a sense of anticipated existential threat. This anticipation is rooted in the inherent instability of capitalist development, although it is distorted through propagandistic, domination-based narratives, thereby negating the utopia of the social individual. The very existence of the political right depends on this dynamic. The political right, at least partially consciously, exploits this crisis of bourgeois emancipation perspectives, capitalizing on it politically. To address crisis phenomena, the right proposes authoritarian measures and individualizes or personalizes these crises by blaming specific groups of people – migrants, Jews, the poor, the left, and so on. These reifications intensify the general existential threat inherent in the capitalist dynamic, thereby positioning the political right (even more) as a viable savior from the misery it co-created.

This personalization, expressed through reified accounts of societal relations, hinders the open and honest articulation of life problems, as there is a danger of being held personally responsible for societal issues, further promoting personalization. The most extreme example is found in the Nazi-established ghettos, concentration, and extermination camps. In these settings, if inmates criticized the conditions as insufficient for survival, they would not receive kindness but rather drastic personal accountability, potentially leading to death. The slogan "Arbeit macht frei" (Work sets you free) embodies the fascist perversion of bourgeois emancipation notions. Today, a milder form of this rhetoric is seen among bourgeois politicians who assert that those who do not work should receive nothing, regardless of whether they can find a perspective in and for their work under current conditions.

The political right can be said to defend bourgeois rights in an exclusionary and reactionary manner by attempting to reappropriate capital, that is societal wealth, through measures of value made obsolete by the (ongoing) crisis of bourgeois society. They perceive the potential for the emancipation of the social individual as aexistential threat, viewing it as decline, degeneration, or undesired equalization. This opposition is rooted in a fear of losing traditional privileges and a reactionary desire to maintain existing hierarchies.

Now, I will turn to the therapeutic application of these reflections.

Chapter 7: Four Recommendations for Therapeutic Work from Critical Psychology

The concluding section presents four recommendations for therapeutic work. First, avoid understanding political orientation as an identity, personal characteristic, personal opinion, or character trait (for critiques of such conceptions, see: Bourdieu 1982, 2001; Markard 1984). Instead, view political orientation as a practice grounded in one's conduct of life within the social arrangement of everyday life (Dreier 2020; Marvakis 1996). This perspective helps move beyond unproductive distinctions between left and right, which often result in conflicts where one side is considered right and the other wrong. These conflicts are typically resolved by attempting to change oneself or the other, or by ignoring conflicting political orientations altogether.

Moreover, understanding political orientations as practice can help shift the focus from defining political orientations to recognizing them as a problem. Indeed, this approach frames political orientations as an unresolved socio-historical issue tied to societal emancipation. Part two has presented an account of this problem, illustrating political orientations as historically changing relations of theory and practice.

Second, an adequate understanding of changes in political orientations is essential. Ute Osterkamp's theory of agency and 'productive needs' (1975, 1976, 1978, 1991b) can describe changes in political orientations as problems of meta-motivation (Nissen 2023). Third, it is important to view the power, potency, and persuasiveness of radical right-wing orientations as a response to an anticipated, imagined yet real inability to act or powerlessness due to social existential threats. However, this should not be used as a simplistic interpretive schema applied to clients/patients; otherwise, there is a risk of misapplying critical social theory directly, thereby limiting emancipatory possibilities within therapy. It is also crucial to reflect on how one's own political orientation might contribute to the foreclosure of these emancipatory possibilities.

Consequently, my fourth and final recommendation emphasizes the challenge of developing specific meta-motivation to critically question one's own political orientation. This difficulty must be acknowledged not only in others, such as clients, but also in therapists themselves. This process involves recognizing one's own demoralization and acceptance of existing power structures – a recognition that cannot be achieved without adopting a new standpoint that facilitates such reflections. To elaborate, I will share some insights from Ute Osterkamp's work (1980b, 1982, 1996, 2008, 2018), where she describes such developments as a new morality. This new morality, I argue, can be seen in relation to the historical emancipation horizon embodied in the utopia of the social individual.

7.1. Political Orientation as Practice

I have suggested to understand political orientations as practice because this will help us to understand, referring to the Sartre quote in the introduction, the conditions under which people choose their political orientation – including ourselves. Understanding political orientations as practice is a first step to grasp political orientations from the standpoint of emancipation as problems historically changing relations of theory and practice.

What do I mean by my suggestion to understand political orientation as practice? According to Marvakis (1996:38–52), this refers to orientating oneself 'in' the societal space to uphold subjective agency in the long term. Agency, as conceptualized in Critical Psychology, involves the capacity to act and make choices within the constraints of the societal arrangement of one's own everyday conduct of life (Dreier 2020; Holzkamp 1983, 1996).

Let's start with a simple example (vgl. Marvakis 1996:38f): finding my way to a conference. I might rely on public transportation, assuming it works as

planned. If I miss my connection, I face an orientation problem, but one that can often be resolved straightforwardly—perhaps by catching the next bus or train.

Contrast this with political orientations, where problems are never straightforward. Political orientations address more complex societal questions, such as: “How should I lead my life to pursue my needs and passions in this world? What can I rely on?” For instance, consider the question: “What work skills should I develop that can be market effectively? Should I sell my intellectual skills or my manual labor? What is worthwhile? How do I respond if my way of life feels socially threatened or questioned? Who would support me? Which relationships should I build or avoid, and which institutions can I trust?”

These questions necessarily involve anticipating future developments, which are evaluated emotionally (Marvakis 1996:25–37). Therefore, political orientations must articulate a subjective vision of society; they are active imaginations rather than mere reproductions of societal images found in political culture (Marvakis 1996:59f). In part 2, I described the creative reimagination that precedes cognitive processes as fabulation and liminality. This anticipatory dimension of political orientations embodies the transgressing principle of hope in the sense described by Bloch (1959; Marvakis 2006, 2007): “What should society be like for me and others to lead satisfying lives?” This doesn't need to be universal; right-wing radical orientations, for example, but not only those, involve exclusion.

Political orientations also encompass ideas of political practice. Thus, political orientations, as I have suggested in part two, are always historical relations of theory and practice. The individual desire for emancipation is never invented from scratch but rests on the attempts of preceding generations to bring about emancipation. However, the societal conditions for emancipation are changed historically, not just by past attempts, but also through technological development. For instance, social media constitutes a more recent development in the public sphere. Furthermore, contemporary social movements and the form of institutionalized political will always play an important role in shaping the preconditions for individuals to draw and reflect on historical experiences and possibilities of politics. This will influence questions like: “How can I influence societal processes? Through elections, social movements, union activities, or engaging in class struggle theory and practice? Or do I become a political soldier of fascism?”

Thus, political orientations, as subjective relation of theory and practice, cannot be disentangled from subjective conceptions of historical relations of theory and practice that constitute subjective moments of the societal process. In other words, what is subjectively understood as political orientation is not only based on a form of theorization but also relies on the prevailing imagination of political orientations embedded within the dominant political culture. However, this characterization is still insufficient as long as it does not take into account the potential and promises for freedom of capital. For instance, the political management of the COVID-19 pandemic has led to a resurgence to work from home. This was only possible due to technological developments such as videoconferencing. This provided for some with big enough living spaces and

without responsibilities for child-care new experience of freedom, while for others the closing down of child-care services while having to work from home created new restrictions.

Based on the understanding of political orientations as historical relations of theory and practice that constitute subjective moments within the societal process, it follows that political orientations must involve abstraction, both as concepts and as the process of developing such concepts (Ollman 2015). This necessity arises because the societal process can never be immediately accessible (Marvakis 1996:53–64); it can only be grasped through abstractions and imaginations. This can be illustrated again, by example of the COVID-19 pandemic. A section of the middle classes experienced the restrictions as the state intervening against their will violently in their lives. A lot of small shop and restaurant owners got bankrupt. To make sense out of that, they had to revert to abstractions. In absence of a progressive political answer, to these restrictions, this resulted for some to employ conspiracy theories. This was less likely for others, who experiences those measures as liberating, or considered them as collective care-taking of people who are more vulnerable to COVID-19.

These abstract terms to make sense of society and its capitalist dynamic may not always be concepts in the strict sense but can include symbolic representations, myths, music, literature, films, (other) technologies and even gestures (Nissen 2023:149). All kinds of cultural objects can serve as orientation aids or political meaning-making resources (Nissen speaks of prototypes 2009, 2023:254–60; 2019). They are societally produced and integral to political culture (Marvakis 1996:50–63). This includes pamphlets, historical representations, political-ideological writings, and propaganda. In addition, there are conceptions and more transient imaginations developed in informal discussions among friends and social circles that meet more or less regularly. These informal discussions form part of the everyday fabric of how individuals orient themselves within society.

Furthermore, societal developments can never be understood purely from the immediacy of the present. However, some abstractions and imaginations function as more immediate orientation resources due to the prevailing political culture. For example, the utopia of the social individual, as embodiment of capitals potential for freedom, is largely erased from political culture today.

Lastly, we can only understand others' political orientations through the lens of our own political orientation. This is illustrated in the interesting articles by Paul Parin (1975, 1989), a Marxist psychoanalyst and pioneer of ethnopsychanalysis, about the role of the critique of society in the psychoanalytic process. He emphasizes the importance of integrating the critique of society into the psychoanalytic interpretation process, arguing through case studies that patients often experience a “pseudo-healing” by conforming to social groups and adopting their ideologies. However, this leaves a “residual neurosis” untreated unless the psychoanalyst also critically examines this social conformity. Parin argues that psychoanalysis will forfeit its potential if the analyst is blind to societal factors.

Paul Parin recounts an episode involving a white American analyst and a Black patient where the analysis stalled despite the analyst's efforts to address the patient's fears and mistrust rooted in social and racial dynamics. The breakthrough came when the analyst realized that offering the patient a lower hourly fee, compared to wealthier patients, reinforced the patient's sense of being undervalued due to him being black. After adjusting the fee to a higher rate, the analysis proceeded effectively. However, Parin criticizes this adjustment, arguing that it introduced a new parameter, changing the analytical setting and replacing interpretation with the analyst's acting out. He believes this missed the opportunity for deeper interpretation of the patient's transference issues and social context. Parin asserts that understanding and critiquing social realities and prejudices should be an integral part of the psychoanalytic process to overcome transference resistance and ensure a more profound therapeutic outcome. Parin proceeds by presenting case examples from his own work to explain how a Marxist critique can enhance the psychoanalytic process.

While I agree with Parin that psychotherapy can benefit from such a critique, it should be noted that his perspective is based on a specific interpretation of Marxism that warrants scrutiny. Parin assumes that he possesses the objective account of the problem of capitalism, but he does not engage critically with the Marxist tradition, which encompasses multiple interpretations of this issue. This assumption paradoxically underestimates the extent to which political orientations shape the therapeutic process and fails to take historical context seriously enough.

For Parin, political orientations can be categorized as right or wrong, more or less adequate. However, he overlooks the issue of political orientations as historically changing relations between theory and practice. In part two, I argue that we should understand political orientations as attempts to resolve and comprehend the problem of capitalism. This perspective emphasizes that the problem of capitalism remains unresolved and that past failed attempts to address it—both Marxist and non-Marxist—now shape the character of the problem itself. I contend that this has led to the alienated experience of modern life and that no Marxist account can claim to be beyond these resulting contradictions. Only dialectics from within these contradictions is possible.

Moreover, it is crucial to remember that political orientation is never purely an individual practice but always a social and historical one. Consider, for instance, party membership or discussions at the local pub, which inevitably involve the categorization of other political orientations. Similarly, education—both formal and informal—encompasses interactions with friends, participation in sports clubs, engagement with social media, and even therapy sessions. In these contexts, we form ideas about social conditions as possibilities and restrictions for living our everyday lives and relate those ideas to the ideas of others, either agreeing or disagreeing with them.

I have described these processes, briefly outlined here, in greater detail in part two, where I also propose additional concepts to enhance our understanding of these processes.

7.2. Political Orientations and the Desire for Agency

Understanding political orientations requires recognizing the desire to expand agency. However, individualistic accounts of agency are insufficient for this task as they reflect the alienated experience of modern life while remaining unconscious of this alienation. We do not merely live our lives under pre-given societal conditions; society is a product of collective action. We are never just participants in social practices but also contributors to their change—both individually and collectively. An adequate account of agency and desires for agency must acknowledge this dynamic.

A rich description of agency can be found in the theories developed in Critical Psychology. Agency, as defined by Osterkamp (1976) and later further developed by Holzkamp (1983, 1996), refers to the individual's ability to determine their living conditions by participating in the collective control over the social process. Morten Nissen (2023:118–29), in his reading of Osterkamp, suggested that this should be understood as participation in collective care, which is a “collaborative process of anticipatory care for the community and thereby for oneself” (ibid.124). This definition emphasizes what control over the societal process means from the standpoint of an individual whose existence necessarily depends on engaging with the societal process. I will illustrate what that means.

In a basic sense, agency understood as participating in collective care means finding ways in the everyday conduct of life to satisfy and cultivate one's needs. The everyday conduct of life entails engaging in social practices that constitute daily life (Dreier 2020). Throughout their lives, individuals participate in various social practices. Family life, work, and leisure can be understood as composed of diverse social practices. Therapy, too, can be viewed through the lens of social practice (Dreier 2008). By participating in these social practices, individuals develop subjective capacities, needs, and desires that define their humanity, emphasizing that needs are not pre-given, stable objects (Nissen 2023). Additionally, thinking, feeling, imagination, and desire are not empty capacities²⁸ but are always interrelated with and constituted through the culture and technologies that shape these social practices (ibid.).

The everyday conduct of life highlights that individuals actively lead their lives, ‘using’ their subjective capacities, needs, and desires to ‘choose’ which practices to engage in and how to engage in them. It also indicates that individuals are joined together by participating in social practice (Dreier 2020; Nissen 2023:130–43). The interrelation of these practices constitutes the societal process as collective care. Therefore, it is better to think of agency as a shared capacity. When individuals enter therapy, they often do not feel that they ‘choose’

²⁸The rejection of ‘empty’ subjective capacities marks a significant departure from many mainstream and some critical psychology approaches. This shift, influenced by recent advancements in the Scandinavian tradition of Critical Psychology and developments within the cultural-historical tradition, critiques the assumption of empty subjective capacities such as feeling, thinking, and motivation. This assumption creates the artificial question of how individual psychological life is mediated with society and culture (González Rey 2011; González Rey, Mitjáns Martínez, et al. 2017; Koch 1999). The issue of assuming empty subjective capacities reflects a reification of subjectivity, rooted in an alienated and contemplative stance toward the societal process (Lukács 1923).

their path but rather that their subjective capacities, needs, and desires dictate their choices, or they experience these as constraints on living the life they want, while some of their needs and capacities seem to desire a different life.

However, the practices that constitute everyday life are not only arranged by the individual course of life but are always arranged societally. This means that the agency of individuals is both limited and enabled by this societal arrangement. This arrangement is not stable but subject to the dynamics of capitalism, as described in part two. Individuals must continuously adapt to the changing social practices in which they need to participate to sustain their livelihood.

As individuals engage in changing social practices, a desire arises to expand their control over these changes. For most people in capitalism, this desire manifests as the pursuit of a crisis-proof job to provide an enjoyable life, having assets, maintaining health and well-being to be able to work, and developing their capacities accordingly. Alternatively, it involves being dependent on others who have sufficient assets, or in the case of children, hoping that adults have things under control. Others might rely on welfare state services, hope for their political party to serve their interests, or depend on the economy to favor their investments or sustain their family. However, the desire for agency can also lead to participating in politics, unionizing, and other forms of collective action.

The socio-historical dynamics of capitalism create manifold compulsions, compelling individuals to develop themselves and others to fit societal and social demands. Simultaneously, needs and desires arise that extend beyond those demands, resulting in conflicting needs and desires of which individuals are only partly aware. As discussed in other parts of this article, societal contradictions are the main drivers for the production of these opposed and conflicting needs and desires, not an ahistorical condition of human nature. This has been addressed in part two as the problem and contradiction of motivation.

Although psychoanalytic theory has not explicitly developed a theory of the desire for agency, it has a rich tradition of examining how family demands give rise to conflicting desires, which can overlap with other social practices and their distinct demands. Perhaps the most well-known example is how the tension between the desire for autonomy and dependence in childhood influences partnerships in adulthood. Additionally, the intergenerational conflict experienced by a child, whose desire for care is necessarily frustrated by the primary caregiver due to others' demands for care and affection, exemplifies how caregivers must adapt their lives to the demands of the societal arrangement of collective care.

Furthermore, understanding individuals as active subjects of their lives implies that they can collectively expand their agency by profoundly transforming the process of collective care. A profound transformation not only entails changing social practices collectively but also emphasizes the potential to overcome the false necessity of opposed needs, as highlighted by the term “*expansive (or generalizing²⁹) agency*” (Nissen 2023:129). This requires

²⁹The original German term ‘verallgemeinerte Handlungsfähigkeit’ can, in some respects, be better translated as “generalizing agency,” emphasizing the development of agency that transcends the false

decentering the understanding of conflictual demands in specific social practices, moving beyond the immediacy of situational understanding toward comprehending the totality of the societal arrangement of everyday life. Such an understanding necessitates a profound expansion of agency developed from the standpoint of the individual participating in social practices.

Thus, “*expansive* (or *generalizing*) *agency*” can be seen as a movement “of overcoming immediacy, of *generalizing* in the sense of reflecting how immediate actions of self and others are made possible by common social conditions and technologies and can be transformed collectively” (Nissen 2023:129). This movement presumes meta-motivation—the motivation to change motivation—because attempts to overcome limitations can never guarantee the intended outcome and always carry the risk of losing the available, albeit limited, agency. Expansive agency “also implies a self-overcoming, which at times may rupture or deny the developmental continuity in a kind of dichotomization, and even may imply the ‘little death’ of a dissolution of specific forms of agency” (ibid.).

The Problem of meta-motivation and productive needs

The question of how expansive agency emerges brings us to the problem of meta-motivation and productive needs, or the desire for agency. Abraham Maslow (1967) introduced the term metamotivation, indicating “that we need *meta-motives* to drag us free: *Motives for transforming our motives*” (Nissen 2023:4). Thus, we can say that the problem of meta-motivation is frequently encountered in psychotherapy. When we encounter political orientations in therapy that restrict freedom, we need an adequate conception of the problem of meta-motivation.

Is Maslow’s account of meta-motivation sufficient? His concept describes the motivation of individuals to reach their full potential or, in other words, the motivation for individuals to achieve freedom and emancipation beyond the realm of physical necessities. His hierarchy of five sets of needs suggests that lower-order needs must be satisfied for higher-order, or meta-needs, to emerge, ranging from physiological needs to safety, belongingness, esteem, and finally, the meta-needs of self-actualization (Maslow 1967). Maslow’s individualistic conception suggests needs as more or less stable entities that serve as individual properties, and self-actualization refers only to the potential of individuals. However, beyond Maslow’s focus, we also need to think of meta-motives as cultivated collectively (ibid.).

Maslow’s conception of meta-motivation is insufficient for understanding political orientations because it does not address how the desire arises for individuals to intervene in the societal process to satisfy and cultivate their needs. This is crucial for understanding political orientations, as they imply how individuals can exert influence on the societal process to satisfy their needs.

necessities of opposed needs. However, I have chosen to use the terms “expansive agency” and “expanding agency,” as Nissen does, because this translation is more suitable in explaining far-right orientations

Thus, political orientations always refer to the dialectics of individual and societal emancipation. Under capitalism, free, disposable time—the precondition for Maslow’s self-actualization—is only achieved by some through appropriating the labor-time of others. The unfree labor of the majority, driven by the compulsion to sustain their livelihood, is the necessary condition of freedom for a minority. Collective care is organized restrictively under capitalism. The motivation to challenge this condition politically implies the motivation to change one’s own motivation for participating in the restrictive organization of collective care. In other words, it implies the motivation to change one’s political orientations.

Ute Osterkamp (1976) developed the term ‘productive needs’ to describe the desire to intervene in the societal process of collective care to satisfy and cultivate one’s own needs. The concept of productive needs helps us understand the problem of meta-motivation in an open way, not limited to specific motives, while recognizing the dialectics of individual and societal freedom. Productive needs point to motives for having or developing a motive to expand agency, or motivation for being motivated to expand agency, while recognizing the societal production of needs or motives. However, productive needs do not refer to some stable innate capacity but are grounded in the dialectics of the metabolic relationship between societal development and nature.

Innate “potentials and proclivities for developing such “productive needs” for agency was the emotional-motivational aspect of how humans are willing and able to participate in anticipatory care. This, then, was Osterkamp’s version of “desire” [...]. Desire for agency (productive needs) directed motivation at the exercise and enhancement of agency as an infinite process, since the cultural development and individuation of societies is an ongoing process that incessantly produces new possible activities with their specific purposes and thus possible motives and kinds of motives” (Nissen 2023:124).

Productive needs or the desire for agency do not automatically result in the development of expansive agency, as we will see shortly when discussing far-right orientations. How does this meta-motivation for expansive agency emerge, pointing beyond the immediacy of false necessities of opposed but real needs? In part two, I described how needs emerge, pointing to a transformation of society when they cannot be satisfied under current conditions. Their dissatisfaction serves as a negation of the present condition, which cultivates motives to take risks in transforming the conditions.

The dissatisfaction of needs is crucial in generating motives to transform local social practices, such as individual therapy sessions viewed as collaborative and evolving practices. Transforming local practices differs because they are less rigid, highlighting that performative aspects like reframing the practice and participating in it significantly impact understanding and cultivating the participants’ motives. A well-known example can illustrate this: individuals compelled to attend therapy against their will, who then discover ways within therapy to address this compulsion, thereby changing the practice of therapy itself. This indicates that the *“reflectivity of activity is not ‘within’ a given activity, viewed statically as a given form or frame, but neither is it ‘outside’ of*

activity, in a ‘res cogitans’ or inside the skull. It is the creative, continuously developing complexity of activity itself (Nissen 2023:145).

However, not all needs whose dissatisfaction point to a different future embody the potential for a profound societal transformation of the immediacy of false necessities. In part two, I described how 'radical needs' for universality and free disposable time emerge from the labor process. These needs are different because they have never been satisfied in capitalism and thus embody the potential to cultivate the desire for expansive agency.

It is crucial not to confuse needs or motives with stable entities. The distinction between radical needs and those pointing to the future is a theoretical distinction that helps us understand how needs and motives arise. Needs and motives are always cultivated by participating in social practices, and this cultivation is also a practice in itself, involving the creative sense-making of ourselves and the world we live in. Needs and motives do not exist separate from meaning-making processes, including so-called physiological needs.

For example, consider a person who is starving to death because they stopped eating, driven by the delusional fear that the CIA has poisoned their food with radioactive material. This situation cannot be sufficiently understood by simply assuming that their physiological needs are unmet. This would imply that physiological needs are separate entities that can either be met or not met. It would also be insufficient to grasp this as merely the internalization of cultural discourses about intelligence services to rationalize pre-existing fears, with the rationalization increasing their fears and overriding the experience of their physiological needs. While this explanation is better, it is still limited by theoretical preconceptions about needs, fears, rationalization, and internalization.

If we consider this example as the cultivation of the meta-motivation to stop eating, we can advance our understanding. However, this would require a thorough discussion of how to conceptualize the subjective process of meaning-making (González Rey 2017, 2019c, 2021; González Rey, Mitjáns Martínez, et al. 2017). While this is beyond the scope of this text, I will make some brief remarks that are important for the subsequent discussion of the persuasiveness of far-right political orientations.

It is crucial not to reduce subjective processes of meaning-making to discourse alone, nor to an inner fictional or fantasy world that is opposed to and more or less well-adapted to the outer objective reality. Instead, subjectivity should be considered a complex mesh of subjective processes involving emotional, conceptual, and symbolic aspects that constitute motivational systems (González Rey 2018a). Thus, subjectivity is an *objective* hallmark of all human life. Human “processes and realities are fictional, not because they are non-objective, but because they are new realities invented by human beings, which progressively separate them more and more from nature” (González Rey 2018b:348).

This theory of subjectivity extends beyond social constructivism and psychoanalysis, advancing our understanding of subjectivity as a “cultural-historical formation,” which includes its theoretical articulation. This position is more adequate because subjectivity “is not anchored in a universal condition of

individuals” (González Rey 2021:40). For instance, the concept of the unconscious allows us to reflect on and cultivate motives. The desire for agency encompasses the production of cultural artifacts such as the concept of the unconscious. These artifacts function as prototypes through which we generalize our understanding and cultivation of our motives beyond situational immediacy (Nissen 2009; Nissen and Mørck 2019). Thus, subjectivity can only be understood theoretically, to grasp the dialectics of theoretical accounts of subjectivity and the cultural-historical production of subjectivity and related cultural artifacts.

Human nature must be understood as inseparable from a complex mesh “of different facts and conditions that are not controlled by individuals or social instances; this fact defines all human processes and realities as objective. Nonetheless, human realities, processes and facts share a qualitative attribute that does not exist in the rest of natural phenomena; their subjective character turns human beings into creators, making them capable of creating new, original realities and processes within which, in turn, subjectivity emerges” (González Rey 2018b:348). Thus, subjectivity ‘distorts’ reality by creating reality.

This account of the subjective desire for agency goes beyond the creative performativity of action and meaning-making in situational contexts. It is understood here as concretely mediated by societal-historical conditions, including inherent contradictory societal development tendencies. While this distinguishes this understanding from poststructuralist and similar theories that primarily focus on meaning-making – even when conceived as ‘unconscious,’ as in psychoanalysis – it does not reject psychoanalytic insights but rearticulates them.

7.3. Power, Potency, and Persuasiveness of Far-Right Orientations

The process of adopting far-right orientations can illustrate the problem of meta-motivation, providing insights into the persuasiveness and power of far-right ideologies. We can start with the assumption that far-right orientations accept violence as a necessity of life and view it as a justified means to expand one’s agency. For an individual who experiences empathy towards people being harmed – those who are the ‘natural’ targets of far-right violence – adopting a far-right orientation will present a subjective problem. This individual will experience their involuntary empathetic responses towards their ‘enemies’ as a meta-motivational problem.

To successfully adapt to the far-right orientation, they must cultivate the meta-motivation to change their involuntary motivation of empathy. They might consider this empathetic response a weakness of character and discuss it as a problem with their new comrades. They may be introduced to fascist ideas about character development that might ‘help’ them discipline themselves. Alternatively, they might develop a personal ‘training’ regime to at least not show their compassion but restrain it, creating a feeling of dissonance. This could even be necessary for them if they inadvertently displayed clear empathy for an

'enemy' during a meeting with their comrades, potentially resulting in being targeted themselves as having a weak character.

For another illustration, consider the example of a young woman who believed it was her 'female' duty to prioritize the needs of men above her own, resulting in a role of patriarchal subservience. In her teenage years, she starts desiring a 'male' profession, dreaming of becoming the boss of a small company. Without having the funds herself, she devotes herself to moving up the ranks in a small consulting company. Having developed extensive empathy to orient herself towards the wishes of others, she becomes a successful agent dealing with customers. However, to move up the ranks, she needs to develop assertiveness and unlearn empathy towards her colleagues. This constitutes a problem of meta-motivation for her.

Both problems of meta-motivation harbor the potential to move towards expansive agency, however unlikely such a trajectory might be. Simply failing to solve the meta-motivational problem in intended ways might create a cascade of further problems, constraining the everyday conduct of life. The contradiction might evolve into feminist consciousness or, in the first example, towards questioning the far-right orientation. However, what will result from that is contingent and highly dependent on the cultivation of the desire for agency to overcome the meta-motivational problems. It will be crucial in which practices and with whom the desire for agency will be cultivated. It might also lead towards the foreclosure of emancipation.

Osterkamp (1980b, 1980a, 1982, 1996) suggests a dialectical conception of far-right orientations as foreclosing emancipation. However, such orientations do not subjectively appear as such; instead, they present themselves as viable trajectories to expand agency, offering a powerful desire to overcome misery. The far-right, as a collective orientation or movement, intensifies societal misery and despair, making itself appear more viable as a solution by proving that life is nothing but a struggle for power. Osterkamp (1982:157) argues, using fascism as an example, that the "effectiveness of fascist" orientations lies in "offering, within the power and domination constellations that arose with fascism, an albeit perverted, expanded possibility of controlling one's own living conditions, i.e., more effectively asserting one's own interests against others. Fascism presented itself as a way out of the situation of powerlessness and lack of perspective of existence that it largely caused, while simultaneously binding people actively to its system through the 'salvation' from the misery it co-created".

The capitalist dynamic is a continuous crisis of society, entailing a permanent existential threat that manifests as proletarianization and has the potential to explode during crises of capital value. Nothing is safe; everything can dissolve. The historical experience of capitalism provides the conditions in which the far-right philosophy of life as struggle is rooted, as is the fascist morality of power. Far-right orientations raise the price tag for humanistic moral behavior, which capitalist competition has already imposed on the everyday conduct of life. This exacerbation of societal "demoralization" (Osterkamp 2008) can only appear as a solution within the immediate reality of the false necessity of opposed but real needs resulting from the crisis of bourgeois values under

capitalism. While the categorical imperative expressed the truth of bourgeois society, industrial production has rendered it obsolete as a horizon for emancipation, as explained in parts two and three. Right-wing political practice generalizes and naturalizes this historical experience of the false necessity of capitalist reality.

However, it is important to remember that this conception of the political Right is not identical to the distinctions that define the Left and the Right by values, as explained in part two. Thus, people or political movements that define themselves as left might inadvertently exacerbate societal demoralization against their intentions. Nevertheless, the cultivation of the desire for agency will take different cultural forms.

The foreclosure of emancipation involves cultivating needs that foster accommodation to power relations. To this end, the externally determined conditions are subjectively idealized and obscured. In the example of the far-right, motives such as discipline and loyalty might serve as a denial of one's own subjugation to power structures, in the hope of securing one's own existence. Thus, one submits to a leader, hoping for some benefit, but does not openly admit this; instead, they claim to be particularly loyal and disciplined. Idealism and self-sacrifice might obscure the evaluation of others for one's own benefit, pretending to sacrifice oneself for the greater good of the 'Volksgemeinschaft' while actually hoping for personal gain.

Lastly, it is crucial to understand that the cultivation of the desire for agency is not necessarily driven by the actual experience of existential threat but rather by the subjective anticipation of it, socially cultivated through far-right imagination and practices. The cultivation of these motives relies on the precondition that alternative ways to address the anticipated existential threat cannot be imagined, such as cynicism or alternative political orientations. In other words, for far-right orientations to appear convincing, not only must an existential threat be anticipated, but also the loss of agency. This raises the question: How can meta-motivation emerge and be cultivated to contradict those motives in the face of the subjective reality of anticipated loss of agency? This emphasizes the need for an adequate conception of subjectivity.

7.4. Conclusion: A New Morality and the Meta-Motivation to Develop the Social Individual

It is unrealistic to assume that someone would question their political orientation simply because someone else disagrees with them. Questioning political orientations requires a strong enough contradictory desire because substantially questioning one's own political beliefs will inevitably result in feelings of shame and guilt. This is especially true for far-right orientations, as it involves admitting that idealistic and heroic motives were merely justifications for comparatively meager motives to secure one's livelihood under externally controlled conditions. Therefore, we need to frame the problem in a way that acknowledges these

difficulties while being cautious not to limit ourselves by theoretical assumptions about subjectivity or preconceptions of our own political orientations.

Framing problems in therapy as issues of meta-motivation can provide a pathway to overcome theoretical limitations. Entering therapy can itself be considered a problem of meta-motivation, as it often involves the anticipation or experience of a loss of agency (assuming therapy is chosen freely). As we have seen, anticipated loss of agency is a crucial subjective aspect that makes far-right orientations appear convincing. From this perspective, we can try to understand the client's viewpoint by asking how they might have chosen therapy over regaining a sense of agency (albeit perverted) through far-right orientations. By identifying how far-right orientations might have failed to fulfill their subjective promises, we can gain insights into transforming this initial problem of meta-motivation into a motivation to question one's political orientation as an adaptation to power relations.

However, this approach requires acknowledging the subjective reality of the anticipated existential threat that makes far-right orientations appear as a reasonable solution for gaining control over one's everyday life. This subjective reality cannot simply be questioned because therapists attempting to do so might be perceived by right-wing clients as delusional or out of touch with societal reality. This situation highlights the false necessity of opposed but nevertheless real partial standpoints. Overcoming this restrictive situation involves taking shared responsibility for such a meta-motivation to emerge. Therapists, too, must question their own political orientations to at least acknowledge the partiality of standpoints as subjective reality without falling into relativism. It is crucial to understand that these difficulties are not solely on the client's side; such a process also presents substantial challenges for therapists.

Osterkamp's reflections provide valuable insights into taking shared responsibility for cultivating motives strong enough to question one's motivations expressed in political orientations. We can understand the challenges of this task as the cultivation of a 'new morality'. This term suggests a trajectory for the desire for extended agency, emerging from the struggle with the 'perverted' expanded possibility of controlling one's living conditions by more effectively asserting one's interests and needs against others. As argued, such 'perverted' expansion of agency is encouraged by the personalization of power relations.

Osterkamp (2008) developed the term 'new morality' in her analysis of literature by Holocaust survivors, including works by Kertész (1993), Krall (1993), and Levi (2002). She examined how the hierarchical and privilege systems in ghettos, concentration, and death camps were deliberately designed by the Nazis to break solidarity among inmates and foster demoralization—a term she adopted from Primo Levi's (2002) book *The Drowned and the Saved*. book *The Drowned and the Saved* For example, by providing insufficient food for survival, inmates were forced to take food from others, making death more likely for those others. Another strategy was the creation of a prisoner functionary system, where aspiring for a higher rank required exerting control over fellow inmates in exchange for privileges that provided a postponement of death,

disguised as the promise of better odds for survival. For a detailed description of these systems, see Wachsmann (2015).

Osterkamp reflects on the survivors' testimonies about these demoralizing strategies as effective means for breaking resistance. She observed that "many former concentration camp inmates did not allow themselves to be tempted to justify their behavior (and thereby the conditions that 'suggest' it) and/or to console themselves with the even greater demoralization of others. Instead, they sought to conceptualize the social mechanisms and functions of their humiliation [...]. In this way, they regained their agency and subjectivity, at least in retrospect" (Osterkamp 2008:16). Osterkamp concluded that this proves—in reverse—the "thesis that a personalized view is always in the interest of existing power relations, by obscuring the social conditions of respective behaviors and thereby largely preventing individuals from articulating their problems to avoid being held personally responsible for them" (ibid.).

Subsequently, the concept of 'new morality' conveys a possible trajectory to overcome the personalization of power relations. To ensure that "demoralization' of people is not seen as an individual failure [thus avoiding personalization], but as a violation of personal integrity and a highly effective means of breaking their subjectivity and 'resistance'," it requires a "radical revision/revolution of 'normal' thinking [...]. Such a new morality, as many former concentration camp inmates emphasize, becomes reality to the extent that we see ourselves as co-responsible for every humiliation inflicted on others – instead of evaluating from a safe distance the different ways they cope with it morally" (Osterkamp 2008:16).

The Task of a New Morality in a Society Dominated by Capital

We can learn from Osterkamp's reflections that it is important not to personalize the adaptation to externally determined conditions, subjugation to power relations, and demoralization. If one accuses right-wing clients of their right-wing orientation as a personal failure of having adapted to power relations, such clients are unlikely to agree with such a view. This approach would fail to acknowledge the subjective reality of their anticipated existential threat and loss of agency. Moreover, giving up far-right orientations necessitates developing a different form of agency, which always implies significant changes in the conduct of everyday life.

Furthermore, assuming from one's own political orientation that only the right-wing orientations of others lead to the subjugation to power relations will hardly contribute to the emergence of a motive to question one's political orientations. This is because the therapist will implicitly display to the client that they are expecting something from them that they are not willing to do themselves.

Instead, it is essential to understand the conditions under which violence against others appears justified and even necessary. It is crucial to have at least some insight into how capitalism promotes the false necessity of opposed but real

needs, encouraging individuals to use others for their own benefit. This condition is exacerbated by the anticipation of threat and loss of agency. Interestingly, entering therapy might also be motivated by the anticipation of the loss of agency.

Understanding political orientations as historically changing relations of theory and practice can provide further insights into the frustration of the desire for agency. For instance, one might assume that the state will provide its 'volk' or 'nation' with sufficient means of subsistence. However, the threat or experience of proletarianization, or perhaps even 'only' deskilling, might lead to the conclusion that this is due to the government not caring for the 'real' 'volk' or 'nation' but instead aiming to destroy the nation. Viewing political orientations as historically changing relations of theory and practice helps to understand this not as delusion but as a specific comprehension and attempt to solve the problem of capitalism by competing over social investment in capital.

Additionally, one must recognize that questioning the adaptation to power relations is ultimately driven by seemingly insignificant yet real selfish motives that negate the utopias of individuality, as outlined in part three. Questioning political orientations in this regard will inevitably involve feelings of guilt and shame, necessitating a counter standpoint to navigate these emotions. Developing a 'new morality' is essential, not just for others but for ourselves as well. Without this, we risk perceiving the adaptation to power relations as a personal failure.

The concept of the 'new morality' acknowledges the absence of simple blueprints for ethical behavior under capitalism. It highlights the crisis of bourgeois emancipation under capitalism, emphasizing the high cost of ethical behavior. Osterkamp's 'new morality' is a negative conception, underlining the contradiction that a 'successful' life can only be achieved at the expense of others. It reveals that the price tag of modern life, which encourages demoralization, must be paid by someone. Osterkamp's reflections do not suggest being more ethical, progressive, or trying harder in the face of demoralization but rather to deny less our own accommodation with power relations.

This approach is crucial because it helps to understand the interrelation of restrictive societal conditions and the everyday conduct of life without personalizing these conditions. It serves as a foundation for taking responsibility for one's own actions. Furthermore, it provides a pathway to move beyond viewing political orientations as identities or character traits, which assume an alignment of theory and practice. Instead, this perspective promotes understanding political orientations as a problem of historically changing relations of theory and practice, emphasizing the distinction between theory and practice. This is a vital precondition for understanding emancipation adequately as a socio-historical problem from the perspective of world history, as I have argued in part two.

Ute Osterkamp's concept of a new morality tasks us, living in a society dominated by capital, to consider for ourselves first what such an endeavour – cultivating the meta-motivation to critically question one's own political motivation – would mean, before we request this from others, no matter how

strongly we might be disgusted or repulsed by political orientations we wholeheartedly reject. Moreover, every therapist knows that we are very limited in our effectiveness when we request clients or patients to engage in potentially troubling and disturbing experiences that we are not willing to participate in ourselves.

The starting point must be to seriously consider the externally determined nature of societal conditions under the dominance of capital. Recognizing 'the price tag' comprehensively emphasizes that not only the right-wing 'other' is affected by demoralization but also ourselves. This means acknowledging the externally determined conduct of our own everyday life and our accommodation to power relations. Ultimately, our own reproduction, secured through our work, relies on others' problems.

Helping professions represent 'troubled person industries,' as Joseph Gusfield (1989) puts it, whose historical genesis is closely linked to the development of the public sector of state capitalism. These professions have emerged from historical attempts to 'solve' the problem of capitalism and to mitigate the effects of proletarianization (see part two for details). Consequently, individuals working in helping professions are always, in the current historical context, urged to pursue the interests of their profession.

However, the pursuit of interests by those working in the helping professions is rarely described as a struggle to secure a livelihood and existence in capitalism. Instead, it is often framed as noble motives, such as solving societal problems, mitigating suffering, and contributing to the greater good of society. This must be questioned, as I have shown in part two. The culture of vulnerability that has emerged from the development of the troubled persons industries has deprived political culture of its vocabulary to understand and articulate societal problems, replacing it with the language of individual subjectivity, thereby personalizing societal issues (Frawley 2024; Haslam et al. 2021; Hilgartner and Bosk 1988; Stone 1989). We must seriously consider how we are urged to justify our own accommodation to power by framing it as progressively helping others with their suffering.

This significant challenge must not be misunderstood as simply adopting a general attitude of gratefulness or being conscious of our privileges. Such an approach would merely personalize power relations. It would not take seriously the task of developing 'a new morality' as a response to demoralization but would instead conflate theory and practice rather than investigating the relationship between the two by recognizing the difference between theory and practice. Therefore, the task is to understand the power relations to which we are subjected as a precondition for 'doing our job' and how we are urged to justify them.

It is crucial to clarify the distinctions in what adapting to power means for oneself compared to others, such as far-right clients. While we all face the overarching condition of living in a society dominated by capital, the social arrangements of everyday life, as expressed in one's own life management, can vary greatly. Additionally, different pathways for cultivating the desire for agency must be recognized. The desire for agency will be expressed in varying political

orientations and might lead to vastly different conducts of life. All of this must be considered to understand the difference between our own adaptation to power relations and the ways in which clients do that. These distinctions should not be reduced to political orientations as identity categories alone.

Considering the preceding elaboration, we can now not only concretize the task that Osterkamp has conceived under the rubric of ‘new morality,’ but also generate a broader outlook beyond her insights. Although Osterkamp’s account provides valuable perspectives, it does not explain how motives emerge for undertaking the incredibly difficult task of developing a new morality. In part two, I suggested investigating the emergence of needs that point beyond the false necessity of opposed but real needs. This discussion has led us to the concept of the social individual.

I contend that the development of the social individual can clarify the task of the ‘new morality’ Osterkamp points to. While it should be obvious, it is nevertheless important to reiterate that psychologists and therapists will not be the vanguard of societal transformation. However, therapists can still play a role in societal emancipation by embracing the task of the new morality. Taking this task seriously might lead us to question how we can take shared responsibility in cultivating the system of needs that the social individual embodies, thereby moving beyond the demoralizing price tag of life under capitalism.

I will conclude the manuscript with two quotes from Ute Osterkamp. These quotes illuminate the distinction between the political fight against right-wing extremism and fascism, and the role of psychology and therapy in this struggle. The latter should prioritize theoretical and historical self-clarification rather than focusing primarily on changing others by psychological technologies.

Osterkamp (1982:170) states, that the “fight against fascism” must not be reduced to being opposed towards fascist or far-right organisations or to protest far-right politics. It must include “the fight against all mystifications of fascism [and the far-right], i.e., against all attempts to deny the objective causes and subjective complicity in fascism, which can only be understood in the context of objective [...] alternatives” (ibid.). Neither a commitment to non-fascist values or democracy nor an abstract opposition to oppression is sufficient. Rather, the political alternative must point beyond the demoralizing constraints of everyday life. It must be recognized that, on “the subjective side, fascism begins with adapting to general conditions” that limit or constrain emancipation, “i.e., the ‘renunciation’ of articulating one’s own dreams and life aspirations. These dreams and aspirations are not eliminated but instead find expression in a distorted form and are, in this form, withdrawn from subjective self-determination and development” (ibid.).

Thus, the “fight against fascism does not primarily mean improving education or revising people’s right-wing orientations, but essentially the fight against external determination, the fundamental insignificance, and insecurity of individual existence, as is typical of capitalist conditions, that finds its intensification in fascism. The aim is to win as many people as possible for this struggle, i.e., to indicate and help create the conditions under which people can overcome their own shadows, their fear, and resist the temptations to arrange

themselves with the prevailing conditions, thereby actively participating in their own and others'" foreclosure of emancipation (ibid.).

Osterkamp (1980a:231) clarifies that the "role of psychology in the fight against fascism is subordinate, though not insignificant. Depending on whether psychology reproduces [externally determined conditions and demoralization] in its theories and methods, or whether it reveals its nature and function, it can either hinder or support the fight against fascism", which should be understood as the fight for emancipation.

What emancipation means will always be a subject of debate. I urge caution in equating emancipation solely with fighting oppression. As argued in part two, such a perspective would suggest an abandonment of broader societal emancipation. I have emphasized that true emancipation, from a Marxist perspective, should mean progress and collective freedom.

Imagining the possibility of freedom requires moving beyond the restrictive political culture of the present. Thus, I have suggested a careful reconsideration of the tasks posed by the problem of capitalism and a critical discussion of the history of failed attempts to move beyond it. Accounts of emancipation that ask for self-limitation in the name of the greater good will likely employ an insufficient political imagination, stuck in the immediacy of capitalist reality and the false necessity of partial standpoints and needs. Therefore, I argue that emancipation must involve moving beyond capitalism by appropriating its potential for freedom. The system of radical needs of the social individual already embodies this possibility, pointing the way forward to a liberated future.

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Racism and Nationalism

System Justification Theory: A half-critical psychology?

Thomas Dohmen

Abstract

System Justification Theory (SJT) researches the foundations of highly relevant societal issues: the defense of a destructive status quo ‘from below’, the ‘inertia’ to take action against injustices and threats to human livelihoods.

At first glance, there are various parallels between SJT and German Critical Psychology (GCP¹, Reimer & Markard, 2013; C. Tolman, 2013) regarding scientific interest and fundamental considerations of the social psychological subject matter: Individuals are considered to be actively and motivationally involved in the legitimation and reproduction of (domination- or exploitation-) systems that are partly to their own disadvantage. Both approaches want to contribute to emancipatory solutions of societal conflicts. To this end, both refer to Marxist analyses, among others. The SJT tries to synthesize “social theory in the Marxian tradition” and “experimental social psychology” (J. T. Jost & van der Toorn, 2012, p. 314). GCP, on the other hand, seeks to develop its methodology for empirical research based on Marxist concepts, which leads away from the ‘mainstream’ of experimental psychology.

In my discussion of SJT I want to show with the help of GCP in which respect the synthesis does not succeed: SJT oscillates between two unintegrated psychologies which are not clearly distinguished by SJT-proponents:

1. The first (more theoretical) psychology can conceive complex nexuses and has a ‘historical intuition’ that is at least partially aware of the dependence of its own object of research on historical/political balances of power.
- 2) The ‘second’ psychology has a methodology based on fallibilism and therefore tends to more strictly falsifiable (and thereby less complex) hypotheses. Overall, it clearly holds the upper hand in the scientific approach of SJT.

This split results in ambiguities in theoretical concepts and empirical research that I will try to outline. Nevertheless, SJT raises crucial questions about the obstacles to solutions of societal crises. Its theorizing and research are worth discussing. My paper aims to raise possible lines of thought for this discussion.

¹ In German this approach is referred to as Kritische Psychologie (written with a capital K)

Keywords

System Justification Theory, false consciousness, objective interests, Critical Psychology, reinterpretation, analytical concepts and empirical concepts, theorizing in psychology, reason discourse

Introduction

Theoretical understandings of the research subject: parallels in SJT and critical psychology

System Justification Theory researches the foundations of highly relevant social issues: the defense of a destructive status quo, the ‘inertia’ to take action against injustices and threats to human livelihood.

At first glance, there are several parallels between the perspectives of SJT and GCP: individuals are seen as actively involved in the legitimation and reproduction of a (domination- or exploitation-) system that is (at least in relevant aspects) to their own disadvantage; and they do this driven by their own ‘motivation’. To address this, both refer to Marxist analyses from which they derive a notion of *objective* social interests and conflicts of related interest groups (e.g., Holzkamp, 1985, pp. 199; Jost, 1995, p. 400; Jost et al., 2019, p. 386). SJT and GCP investigate the benefits and individual costs of violating one's objective interests. Both approaches strive to contribute to emancipatory solutions of societal conflicts. These societal conflicts do, on the flipside, also represent (potentially unrecognized) problems on the level of the individual conduct of life, thereby constituting psychological problems in the narrower sense.

Theoretical aspirations of SJT

SJT aspires to bring together and integrate two “theoretical traditions”: “one coming from philosophy and social theory in the intellectual heritage of Karl Marx [...] and the other coming from social psychologists such as Kurt Lewin, Gordon Allport, Henri Tajfel [...]” (Jost, 2019, p. 264)².

Jost originally set out with the SJT to make the concepts of false consciousness and ideology, borrowed from Marxist social science, fruitful for experimental social psychology. The concept of false consciousness enabled Jost and Banaji to adopt the interpretive perspective of the first publication within SJT (1994). Here an explanation for negative, consensual stereotypes was provided: Disadvantaged people actively shared negative stereotypes about

² Jost locates SJT in an impressive family tree of theories (J. T. Jost, 2019; J. T. Jost & van der Toorn, 2012). On the Marxist side there are e.g. Marx, Gramsci, Lukaczs, Adorno, Elster on the social psychological Lewin, Festinger, Lerner, Tajfel. Rather than a reference of the sources from which SJT was systematically derived, this family tree indicates, where in one way or another one can find similarities in perspective, terminology or scientific approach.

themselves. This was explained as driven by the purpose of consolidating the status quo and thereby simultaneously their own disadvantage. According to this interpretation, this is a case of *outgroup favoritism*. The article succeeds in pointing out a phenomenon that can plausibly be considered an instance of false consciousness and cannot be explained by Social Identity Theory (SIT), whose research data are reinterpreted by Jost and Banaji. SIT concentrates mainly on a positive orientation towards one's own group (ingroup favoritism)³, but not on the favoritism of an outgroup. SJT postulates, in addition to the scope of SIT, the system level as a distinct psychological level of reference. Motives and emotions, which are not confined to the continuum individual-group, refer to it. In this framework the concept of false consciousness allows SJT to think of a contradictory behavior that tends to be (group) self-esteem-damaging but *at the same time motivated*.

With the concept of false consciousness SJT addresses a blankspace in experimental social psychology: the deceptiveness and self-deception of people is a common object of research. The fact, however, that in the concrete world these are related to social interests, which can be judged on a scientific basis, must seem impertinent to mainstream social science and its ways of thinking that aim at alleged neutrality. With its definition of this concept, the SJT decides to consider the abolition of oppression and discrimination as a scientific task that is related to 'scientific truth', as opposed to being purely normative and thus unscientific. The SJT's understanding and concept of social interest is, contrary to an everyday understanding, independent of the interest being consciously adopted or even agreed with; it is an *objective* interest deriving from social positions in societal structures shaped by inequality. Based on its emancipation-oriented orientation towards the subject of its research, SJT decides to consider the objective interests of disadvantaged groups as theoretically important. SJT does so despite the fact that group interests are often unrecognized by group members themselves and are not immediately useful for predicting or measuring behavior, even according to SJT (Jost & van der Toorn, 2012).

Thus, the SJT quite boldly brings certain aspects into the mainstream debate that have been banished from there due to a false sense of neutrality and a constricting methodological approach.

In its further development, SJT addresses system-stabilizing biases using implicit measures to capture self-deprecation. It examines the extent to which this provides psychological relief to the disadvantaged. It investigates which situational factors elicit System Justification (SJ). It examines various motivational foundations related to SJ (see below). It postulates social psychological models of action that intend to show tendencies to overcome the status quo (activism, collective action).

³ SIT investigates, among other things, how situations (and perceived qualities of overarching systems) shape individual group behavior, specifically identification with groups and thereby individual concept of the (group-)self. Of great importance is the relation of ingroup vs. outgroup. It is one of the key theories in mainstream social psychology, cf. Schnur in this volume.

On a theoretical level, Jost explicitly does not classify the SJT as a competitor to SIT, which conducts research on similar issues. SJT is concerned with supplementing and suggesting corrections (J. T. Jost, 2011).

Thematic areas of application of SJT include environmental awareness, various forms of discrimination, protest motivation, nationalism and anti-racism, conservatism research, utopian thinking.

My approach to the subject matter: reinterpretation, critical review

My discussion of the SJT is guided and informed by the approach of reinterpretation with the concepts of GCP, as conceptualized by Markard (1994). My basic questions and concerns are, first, delineation and immanent critique of SJT based on its own aspirations: How coherently does the integration of different theories succeed? What is made possible by this attempt at integration? Second, discussion with the help of GCP-concepts: what are the scope and limits of SJT viewed through the lense of critical psychology's understanding of the nexus of the individual and society?

Why this approach? Deviating from the common approach in psychology, I assume with GCP that it is important to *analyze* concepts or constructs. GCP argues this is necessary because, among other things, concepts are a *prerequisite for* empirical research. One the one hand, theoretical concepts influence what becomes observable in the first place and, on the other hand, they determine how the observed can be interpreted (cf. Markard, 2015, pp. 168). Accordingly, concepts are a *necessary* foreknowledge. Therefore, it should be understood decidedly as a scientific task in psychology to clearly explicate and clarify theoretical concepts. From this point of view, taking terminology from everyday language and tacit knowledge or keeping conceptual understandings merely implicit, is not a scientifically sound approach. However, this is partly a common approach of psychological concept formation (cf. Kessler & Fritsche, 2018, p. 15; Markard, 1991).

Critical psychology develops basic psychological concepts through interdisciplinary, i.e. the so-called *empirical-historical analysis*⁴. The basis of this method are studies in evolutionary and social history. Here the assumption applies that the developmentally earlier (in the sense of phylogenetically or historically earlier) is the *conceptually more general*. I.e. a minimal definition (e.g. of emotion) is not obtained from the overlapping areas of different definition attempts. It is rather determined by the phenomenon's earliest developmental precursor as reconstructed by historical analysis of the human psychophylogenesis. GCP further analyzes the historical process of interaction in which the individual and society both have evolved and how, within this historical process, said precursors of psychological functions have further developed qualitatively, finally constituting the human psyche in its specificity.

⁴ GCP distinguishes between *historical empiricism* and *actual empiricism*. The former refers to its method of conceptualization, which is based on historical reconstructions of the development of mental functions. The latter refers to research with people in the present and corresponds more or less to the common understanding of empirical research. For detailed accounts see Holzkamp, 1985; and in English Tolman, 2013.

Thereby a foundation of psychology and its basic concepts is proposed (in detail: Holzkamp's *Grundlegung der Psychologie* [Foundation of Psychology] 1985)⁵.

In this progression of historical analysis, the mediation relationship between the individual and society in the current 'state of development' of capitalist societies is deliberated. GCP analyzes this on the basis of Marxist social theory. It provides an elaborate repertoire of concepts to psychologically grasp the relationship between individual and society. GCP makes a proposal as to what is *essential* about the subject matter of psychology (specifically regarding humans, Holzkamp, 1985, pp. 513). In its application the GCP is intended to help analyze "experience and action" regarding "the extent to which certain social demands and constraints are [covertly or unconsciously; TD] expressed in them" (Markard, 2012, p. 67⁶).

On this basis, other psychological theories can also be examined as to what extent they do justice to the essential aspects as understood by GCP. For this purpose, a *reinterpretation* in critical-psychological terminology is carried out. Its aim is the explication of the epistemological substance ("Erkenntnisgehalt", Markard, 1994, p. 126) of the examined approach. In my text, the reinterpretation elements will be used to give a new perspective for a reflection on SJT (cf. Dohmen, 2021).

SJT does not exist systematically *as a coherent body of theory*. Theoretical concepts, as well as their function and relations among each other, and other apriori assumptions are scattered among: review articles that rather additively summarize research results, discussion sections of study publications, and debate papers disputing with other approaches. Also, Jost's first monograph on SJT, entitled "A Theory of System Justification", published in July 2020, does not contain a 'theory section' in the narrow sense. Here, too, the theoretical concepts of SJT are mainly to be found in the context of reviews of various, own research projects. They remain unintegrated within the book⁷.

It was therefore necessary to compare and relate statements of the SJT, to explicate implicit assumptions⁸ and to confront this with self-portrayals of the SJT.

It is not clear which statements are to be regarded as theoretically pertinent and which, for example, stem more from the 'political intuition' of individual authors (especially Jost's). Nevertheless, in order to appropriately receive the theoretical thrust of the SJT, I think it is essential to consider several of these theoretical statements by Jost and colleagues as a substantial part of the SJT. They are statements about the foundations of theoretical concepts, statements that clarify the (historical) scope of the SJT, contain demarcations and lines of

⁵ This distinguishes it from evolutionary psychological considerations, which do not focus on this process of qualitative further development

⁶ Quotes from German texts were translated into English by me.

⁷ E.g., the fourth chapter on prejudice is mainly based on Jost & Banaji (1994) and Jost (1995), whose ideas on false consciousness were later modified and simplified to facilitate operationalization (see Jost & van der Toorn, 2012, p. 322). This is, however, not taken into account in this book chapter.

⁸ Accordingly, my engagement with the SJT has, if you will, a partly hermeneutic quality: I had to try and make implicit things explicit. This reflects some ambiguity of the SJT itself. On the other hand, this explicative approach is partly speculative and a potential attack surface of my work.

connection to other approaches, and statements in the vein of social theory and, to a certain extent, political statements within the framework of SJT.

To trace what SJT does, it is necessary to distinguish different 'conceptual qualities': Drawing on ideas of German Critical Psychology, I have tried to trace the internal hierarchy of concepts of SJT by distinguishing *categories*, *analytical concepts*, furthermore *single-theoretic assumptions* ("einzeltheoretische Annahmen" (Holzkamp, 1985, p. 28), e.g., regarding how the subjects of analytical concepts are interrelated) and *descriptive concepts* ("Beschreibungsbegriffe" *ibid.*, p. 513). *Categories* are the overarching basic concepts of an approach⁹, which constitute it and structure how it empirically approaches the world. They determine which aspects of the "infinite fullness of aspects of reality" (*ibid.*, p. 509) are prioritized, what constitutes their essence, their 'intrinsic logic', and how they must be researched accordingly. From the point of view of GCP, there is no theory without constituting categories, whether or not they are made explicit.

Crucial in this context is the *quality* of analytical concepts. They do not serve the purpose of assigning observed phenomena under an 'umbrella term' (i.e. descriptive concepts). Analytical concepts in psychology are a "means to identify the essence of psychical phenomena and to be able to grasp the variety on the level of outward appearance as their different manifestations"¹⁰, (Holzkamp, 1985, p. 327). Another facet of this idea is that aspects that are analytically distinguishable may, 'in fact', not occur separately in the empirical material and are also not clearly separable (e.g., emotion and cognition).

A: Theoretical SJT

In section A, I will outline aspects of the "theoretical half" of SJT and its problematic transition to the "empirical half."

***False consciousness* in SJT as a category and analytical concepts derived from it: the lack of conceptual clarity in SJT**

In the early stages of STJ Jost (1995) defined false consciousness based on two criteria: "the holding of [1] *false or inaccurate beliefs* that are [2] *contrary to one's own social interest* and which thereby contribute to the maintenance of the

⁹ Or of the single scientific discipline. Holzkamp's *Grundlegung der Psychologie* (Foundation of Psychology) aspires to work out the categories of the discipline of psychology thereby clarifying its subject. Where single scientific disciplines are fragmented in themselves (quasi pre-paradigmatic), however, the fragments have their own categories, whose scientific dignity obviously has to be discussed because of said fragmentation.

¹⁰ My lay translation of this short quote may give the false impression of a flowery language related to a spiritual search for a 'true essence' and 'deeper meaning' that can be found in certain areas of psychology. Holzkamp's writing style is, to the contrary, very meticulous and technical. The theoretical point of reference here is rather an epistemological differentiation of essence and appearance that is expressed in an exemplary quote by Marx: "But all science would be superfluous if the outward appearance and the essence of things directly coincided" (Marx, 2010, p. 592).

disadvantaged position of the self or the group” (p. 400; emphasis and brackets: TD). The aspect of factual falsity [1] is later deliberately dropped (cf. Jost & van der Toorn, 2012, p. 322). For Jost, the concept has the following directed function against oppression, i.e., it is not ‘neutral’: “The concept of false consciousness [...] helps to identify inaccurate beliefs of subordinates which serve to perpetuate their social, economic, or sexual domination” (1995, p. 400). Oppression is a characteristic of the status quo, or “historically situated, enduring systems of inequality and exploitation” as Jost and colleagues say (Jost et al., 2019, p. 384)¹¹. Jost thinks of false consciousness as being ‘generated’ by interaction of “bottom-up” and “top-down” processes (2019, p. 265). Top-down processes in this sense are, for example, the impact of the dominance and pervasiveness of published opinion siding with the interests of social elites: “elite communication” (ibid.). This elite communication, he argues, addresses ‘conformist needs’ in people. The focus of SJT, however, is on bottom-up processes; meaning a motivational readiness that, in a sense, ‘seeks’ to realize itself in a conformist fashion (ibid.).

Beyond the semantic definitions given above, false consciousness is a crucial concept for the *epistemological interest* of SJT (i.e. being a tool for emancipation) and the internal structure of the theory. As a *category* (see above), it prompts investigation of cases in which people harm their own interests through their very own subjectively motivated behavior which stabilizes societal conditions to their disadvantage. Finding out how this motivated legitimization of ‘the system’ comes about (the eponymous *System Justification*) is what sparks the interest of SJT. Only the quality of *false consciousness* and the associated ‘self-harm’ make *system justification* an urgently relevant topic that concerns social emancipation.

Below I will demonstrate how the concept of false consciousness, as a *category*, structures the arrangement of SJT’s theoretical concepts at lower levels of abstraction. In the course of my discussion, it will also be shown that a certain understanding of the concepts of *justification* and *group status* necessarily implies that they are in fact analytical concepts. Their analytical quality is, however, not systematically understood in SJT’s theorizing.

A theoretical perspective unfolded from the concept of false consciousness

A starting point to come to grips with the internal structure of SJT is the reconstruction of the way the concept of system justification relates to the category of false consciousness.

The concept of system justification, respectively system justification motivation, is central to SJT. Jost gives the following definition: “System justification is the social psychological process whereby an individual perceives, understands, and explains an existing situation or arrangement in a way that legitimizes and maintains the status quo” (Jost, 2020, p. 83).

¹¹ The quotes are also meant to illustrate the emancipatory impetus found in some remarks in SJT publications.

The extent of SJ (or SJ motivation) varies by *situation* and *individual disposition* according to SJT.

Situational factors include threat to the system, dependence on the system, perceived inevitability of the system, and long existence of the system (cf. Jost, 2020, p. 64).

Important individual dispositions are, first, the individual “chronic” disposition of the SJ-relevant motivational foundation¹²: i.e. a) epistemic motives: reducing ambiguities in understanding; b) existential motives: security; c) relational motives: securing social relations and experiencing shared reality (cf. Jost 2019, p. 275). Second, political orientation. Political orientation according to SJT is, however, to be conceived of as motivated cognition and therefore not independent of said motivational foundations (Jost et al., 2017). For a digest of studies exploring the impact of situation and disposition on SJ see Jost 2019, pp. 268.

SJT embeds SJ in a domain spanning phenomena of socially motivated cognition. These have been explored by various social psychological theories with different emphases. With regard to these theories, SJT sees itself as a complement and extension:

Analogous to system justification, “ego-justification” (EJ) defends the behavior and position of the self; it captures “the need to develop and maintain a favorable self-image and to feel valid, justified, and legitimate as an individual actor” (Jost, 2020, p. 102). This is, for instance, attributed to the focus of *cognitive dissonance theory*. “Group-justification” (GJ) defends the interests of one's social group (Jost & Banaji, 1994, p. 2f.). It refers to the “desire to develop and maintain favorable images of one's own group¹³ and to defend and justify the actions of fellow in-group members” (Jost, 2020, p. 102). This is regarded as the subject matter at the center of *SIT*.

For members of privileged groups favored by the system, it can be assumed that justifying the system is also in their favor on the group and ego level. For members of marginalized groups, on the other hand, ‘psychical processing’ of a situation resulting in SJ affirms a system that disadvantages the group members at the ego or group level: here SJ, GJ, and EJ are not in harmony. These disharmonious aspects represent a ‘dissection’ of false consciousness into motivational forces and counterforces on different psychical levels of reference. Together they constitute a motivational contradiction. The levels of justification (ego/group/system) are supposed to make it possible for SJT to map the tension of ‘individual justification’ (J. T. Jost, 2011 p. 230): By disaggregating the ‘contradictory’ false consciousness into EJ, GJ, and SJ (and group status), it

¹² This is subject to possible internal differentiations ‘within’ the various needs: “It is conceivable that distinctive operationalizations of epistemic, existential, and relational needs—such as needs for certainty vs. control, fear vs. anxiety (or even conscious vs. nonconscious sources of anxiety), and belongingness vs. shared reality—may produce different effects on ideological endorsement.” (Hennes et al., 2012, p. 682); and ambiguities about how the different needs regarding SJ are related (ibid.).

¹³ At this point, the SJT perspective on groups and group justification still *seems* to be in line with SIT. In the course of my discussion it should become clear that this is, in fact, not the case when SJT addresses objective group interests. The selection of “one's own group” can be flexible, but not every group can be the bearer of a social interest as theorized by SJT (see below).

should become psychologically conceivable *without contradiction*. This should ultimately make it possible to translate what seems contradictory into empirical research that requires unambiguity.

Against the background of this dissection into different aspects (EJ, GJ, SJ), which is intended to amount to a sort of 'theoretical operationalization', *false consciousness* can be understood as a *mediation category* ("*Vermittlungskategorie*" in German (Holzkamp, 1985, p. 192): as such, it is intended to address the intersection/mediation of objective and subjective tensions and contradictions. SJ (or SJ-motivation) and GJ are the concepts which in SJT concern the subjective side of this relation; interest and group status concern the objective side.

At this point the following must be emphasized: *these* justification concepts that conceptualize false consciousness can only be understood as *analytical definitions* of an action/motivation directed exclusively at one pole: SJ → system interest; GJ → group interest. They are not identical with *empirical actions* that actually, among other things, justify the system or the group in the real world.

Explicating implicit conceptual qualities: disambiguation of multiple justification concepts in SJT.

I argue that there are actually several, different concepts of justification in SJT. They are, however, treated as if they were one unified concept. These differing concepts are not explicitly elaborated, but are implied in various definitions or conceptual constellations (e.g. the relation between false consciousness and justification).

According to my analysis, SJT uses justification concepts in an analytical function any time it is dealing with false consciousness as a violation of objective interests. This applies especially to the assumption that system interest and group interest are in principle incompatible for the marginalized, which is why SJ has negative consequences for them. In this analytical function, these justification concepts serve to reflect the opposite poles of an objective contradiction (vs. classify empirically present behavior). In the context of false consciousness, the Justification concepts *SJ* and *GJ* are linked to the respective interests (i.e.: conformism and support of the system vs. representing group interests against the system). Only in this way can SJT assume that SJ takes place *without* "self-interest or group-interest" (Jost & van der Toorn, 2012, p. 339). It is, however, not made clear exactly how abstract this statement is. Before anything else this statement makes sense if one understands group interest vs. system interest (and GJ vs. SJ coupled to it) as analytical poles in which these interests are addressed in 'purest form' and ultimate consequence. In this context, gradual 'mixed forms' are not conceptually valid (see figure 1).

Empirically, however, interests or actions directed at interests do not occur separately and in 'pure form' - they are located 'between' the ideal types spelled out by the analytical poles. Therefore, the statement that SJ is undertaken without "self-interest or group-interest" (Jost & van der Toorn, 2012, p. 339) is not

readily applicable to empirical reality. Moreover, it is also not readily possible to determine interests in a concrete and positive way and to know in advance whether attempts to pursue them will be successful. There is the possibility of pursuing interests that are mistaken for one's own (group) interests. This is not considered GJ in the narrow (analytic) sense in SJT analytic justification concepts. This is due to the fact that GJ in the narrow sense *excludes* false consciousness.

Thus, these 'pointed' *analytical* concepts cannot be utilized to clearly classify *empirically present* actions that relate to group and system interests whilst retaining their original meaning and purpose. The idea of pursuing one's own group interest *in the final analysis* is an *analytical* 'determination of direction'. The pursuit of one's own group interest in concrete and practical terms, on the other hand, is complex, demanding, and involves challenges in understanding the world and acting in it. A necessary condition is to identify oneself as a group member of the 'correct group' in the first place.

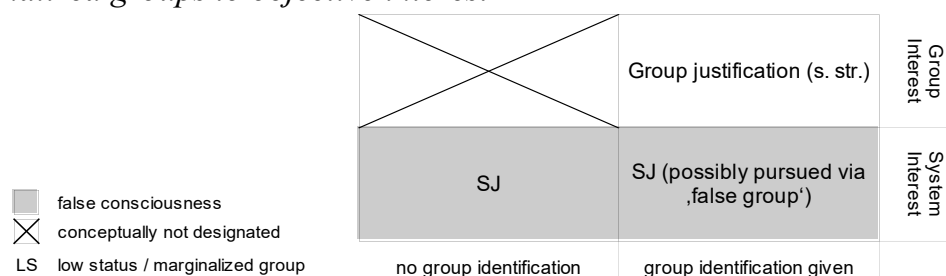
SJT attempts (however not theoretically or methodologically explicated) to take the leap from an analytical level to the empirical: for low group status, the analytical is equated with the empirical, consequently SJ would 'measure' false consciousness in the case of the disadvantaged. From the above analysis, it is understandable that this entails difficulties. First, the coupling of objective interest and particular motive quality 'in pure form' as conceived in the concept of false consciousness is primarily an analytic pole. Second, it is unclear how individual actions and statements are 'psychically founded and composited' and how exactly they relate to which interest. Where *justification* is to be operationalized and measured, this ambiguity of actions and statements with respect to interests cannot be so easily realized. A consideration in Jost and colleagues (2017) points in this direction: Contradictory tendencies from EJ, GJ, and SJ would potentially generate a tense relationship at any moment: "political actors may be motivated by a complicated mix of system-justifying and system-challenging concerns, depending (at least in part) upon the social system that is in question" (p. e19). The very same result of action can thus be influenced in many ways. It could be contradictory in its reference to interests; i.e. the ultimately futile attempt to pursue group interests of marginalized people and system interests at the same time. An action result could also be only a snapshot of a process that is moved by opposing motivational forces. On the basis of the superficial appearance, the 'motivational composition' is not necessarily clear. Judging from this view, statements about the system that are supposed to determine the 'extent of SJ' in SJ likert scales (e.g. "Economic positions are legitimate reflections of people's achievements"; Jost & Thompson, 2000, p. 225), can be further investigated regarding their respective individually different motivational bases. Further below I will elaborate on the issue of individually distinct motivational bases from a perspective of GCP-explanations of the psychological relevance of *reasons for action*.

An example for the conflation of analytical and 'empirical' concept is Osborne, Jost, and colleagues (2019) where ethnic minority group identification is used as a proxy for GJ (e.g., "Being a member of my ethnic group is an

important part of how I see myself”, p. 248). This is done in a constellation where the authors expect GJ to oppose SJ and be a predictor of protest. The reference of GJ to interests is defined on the categorical level and thus forms the basis of the hypothesis of the contradiction between GJ and SJ. However, in its empirical implementation as group identification, the reference to interests is unclear. Empirically, there is a wide range of ‘group actions’ that are not, or only supposedly, in line with group interests. Moreover, their distance to the group interests may vary. This transfer to empiricism is imprecise because the premises of the analytical concepts represent polarities and constellations that are *means of analysis*. They do not immediately describe the phenomena of reality.

Figure 1

The relationship of group justification (GJ) and system justification (SJ) among marginalized groups to objective interest



Annotation. The figure uses *group identification* as an auxiliary construct to clarify the relationships between the concepts. Group identification is *conceptually presupposed* for GJ actions (but not for the existence of group membership and objective interests). A relevant range of ‘group actions’ emerges that do not, or only on a surface level, correspond to group interests (bottom right, SJ). This encompasses a wide range of different actions with varying distance to the group interest.

Abandoned trains of thought in SJT

There are some relevant theoretical implications and desiderata that are inherent in explanations of SJT but have not yet been pursued. These have the tendency to lead away from the methodological approach of the psychological mainstream even more openly.

‘False groups’ – fruitful implication of SJT for analysis & problem for empirical research?

Where SJ, GJ, EJ theorize false consciousness, the group level in SJT is not identical with the group level in SIT: it only addresses groups that meaningfully imply social status (this is not the case, for example, with a conservative party in which workers are organized with multi-millionaires or even billionaires). In this narrow sense, ‘group’ is not a descriptive term, but corresponds closely to the concept of interest. The advantage of this narrow understanding is: *subjective* group identification can thusly also be analyzed as a mechanism of SJ and as false consciousness. Jost shows this exemplarily for national identification (cf. 2019, p. 281). With SIT, one would instead rather grasp national identification as group-ego and assume a corresponding (extended) self-interest.

SJT does not have an *explicit* concept of ‘false groups’ yet. The ‘non-false’ groups with ‘clear status’, in turn, are also not clearly empirically determinable (who belongs to them? What is the concrete group interest?). False and non-false groups are in this respect also *analytical ideas*. A ‘status-mixed’ group constituted by ‘values’ cannot be unambiguously classified ‘as a group’ in this sense. This is because the group members of the status-mixed group would have different, objective group interests. Thus, the SJT considers e.g. the ‘group membership’ of working class conservatives in conservative parties, at least partly, as an expression of false consciousness rather than as group membership in the strict sense (since they would tend to cut their own flesh e.g. by conservative social policy)¹⁴. Where SJT theorizes false consciousness, conservatives (liberals, etc.) are therefore not an ‘actual’ group. Conservatism is subsequently seen as an individual political ideology (with strong implications for attitudes to the status quo) – even though it remains unquestioned that it instigates ‘group practice’.

Here, a group has a clear status and interest that could be pursued with GJ only in the *analytical sense*.

According to SJT, the group interest of marginalized groups is only determined negatively as ‘directed against the system’ and against their own disadvantage. Positive attempts at definitions are (necessarily) abstract: Jost and colleagues (2019), for example, regard objective interest merely as “what is in the rational self-interest of a given social group” (p. 386). Jost, Hennes, and Lavine (2013, pp. 856, 863) and Jost, Banaji, and Nosek (2004, p. 884) understand interest primarily as immediate economic (self-)interest.

Jost and colleagues note in a more recent publication (2019, p. 389) that individuals are themselves ‘status mixed’. They may be discriminated against with respect to multiple social dimensions (e.g. gender, sexual orientation, ethnicity...) and privileged with respect to others.

¹⁴ Jost explains these pitfalls of the group level impressively with the example that in the USA poverty is a relevant factor that ‘motivates’ people to join the armed forces. This is romanticized, he argues, when it is framed as the pursuit of self-interest at the level of the nation's own group (2019, p. 281). In this example, the nation an aspect of social reality, as well as reference point of false consciousness. The concept of false consciousness allows SJT to capture this simultaneity.

Focussing on a ‘narrow set of questions’, however, it seems more easily possible to discern a single criterion that uniquely defines a marginalized group. For example, Osborne, Jost, and colleagues (2019), in order to substantiate their *general* model of protest prediction, examine a problem in which a *particular* status group has a group interest that is specifically directed against that problem: racial discrimination ‘produces’ ethnic minorities as a marginalized group. Here too, however, there may be relevant ‘internal’ group distinctions that may impede action towards the common interest; e.g., class differences. In its empirical research, SJT uses the logic of ‘narrow questions’ to enable assignment to a low-status. However, in its theoretical statements, SJT speaks of “low-status and high-status groups” (Osborne, Jost, et al., 2019, p. 264) in a general sense without this limitation.

Authors of SJT are well aware that groups beyond these status groups practically ‘exist’, such as conservative political groups (with group processes). The concept of false consciousness does not structure all theory parts of SJT. Where SJT is concerned with political attitudes variously related to SJ, it acts differently. Here, SJT also thinks of political attitudes as constituting groups in a broader sense. E.g., there is research with left wing activists as test subjects of a field experiment (J. T. Jost et al., 2012). Their group identification is raised as a predictor of protest, their ‘social status composition’ is not taken into account. They are primarily interesting as specimens who are critical of ‘the system’ and participate in protests. Also, protest as a *group activity*, which does not require shared status in the narrow sense, can be of interest as the dependent variable in SJT research. *False consciousness* is less central to SJT’s conception of said empirical phenomena. The area of interest is rather the predictive quality of individual SJ; in Osborne, Jost, and others (2019), for example, as a mediator of protest activity.

False needs?

The chronic and situational expression of relational, existential, and epistemic needs are an aspect in SJT to explain how the status quo is legitimized ‘from below’. Here the question arises why conservatism has advantages in satisfying said needs subjectively though not necessarily objectively (Jost et al., 2017 p. e9; also Hennes et al., 2012). This also results from the fact that conservatism is focused on clear, simple rules and traditions (Jost et al., 2017). This advantage also exists when conservatism is not hegemonic (it’s structural hegemony would currently, however, be the rule).

There are passages in papers where it is taken into consideration that, for example, self-deception can be the prerequisite for satisfying one’s need for security with conservative positions: “even if conservative politicians are themselves responsible for increasing levels of threat” (Jost & Hunyady, 2005 p. 264).

Unlike to its discussion of consciousness SJT (so far) does not draw an explicit connection from the basic need level to objective interests. One could,

however, think about ‘motivated need constitution and need accentuation’ analogously to motivated cognition. Then one could ask where something is falsely declared to be a need or where one is deceived about one's own needs (being aware that this perspective could also take problematic paths).

Integrating an analysis of societal structures

At various points, Jost has pointed out the need for analyses of societal structures within the framework of social psychological theory (Jost & Kruglanski, 2002, p. 180; Jost, 2020, pp. 30, 83):

What is needed is a sophisticated social psychological understanding of what Bourdieu [...] characterized as “the dialectical relationship between the objective structures and the cognitive and motivating structures which they produce and which tend to reproduce them” (Jost, 2011, p. 252).

SJT has not yet complied with this.

From German Critical Psychology's reference to Marx, it could be learned that societal structures ‘suggest’ objective thought forms (stereotypical ways of thinking about societal relations if you will) that are themselves ‘false’ (e.g. the “fetishism of commodities”, cf. Marx, 2015, pp. 47). *False consciousness* could therefore present itself as an entangled relationship between motivated cognition, on the one hand, and an objective epistemic problem regarding the comprehension of societal processes and one's own interests, on the other hand. Accordingly, possibilities of action and thought ‘embedded’ in societal structures (in their societal mediatedness) should be analyzed in a specific research step. Regarding the question of SJT, this would also imply: analysis of the specific and non-specific determinants of the respective systems, their suggestiveness (in the above sense) and the system-immanent possibilities for action; furthermore, analysis of the integration of a system into the overarching societal system. This would have to be put into relation with an interesting consideration of SJT: To what extent are objectively different structures/systems (or ‘subsystems’) reacted to with identical ‘psychical modes of reaction’; defended as status quo; or mistakenly considered to be an independent system? Interrelating these aspects could help explore societal prerequisites for the application of interventions that SJT has speculated about.

B: ‘Empirical’ SJT

Section B deals with aspects of the more ‘empirically oriented’ part of SJT.

Integration of Marx and Mainstream: Incompatible understandings of science?

In addition to finding conceptual inspiration, John T. Jost also refers to Marx in order to elaborate on the theory of science. In a 2007 article with Lawrence J. Jost, he presents a fallibilism-oriented social psychology as the only valid empirical research:

Marx's own intellectual development led him to abandon 'pure' or 'speculative' philosophy in favor of a search for empirically grounded forms of investigation that resemble those of today's 'mainstream' sociology and psychology. (L. J. Jost & Jost, 2007 p. 299)

Jost & Jost find it ironic that the "critical psychology movement" would instead be purely philosophical; merely a negative critique of psychology that does not practice positive, empirical science (p. 299). Elsewhere, however, they concede that Marx did not simply adopt "a strictly positivist conception of science" (ibid., pp. 315). Their initial argument does not include this concession. The criticism of speculative, metaphysical approaches may be justified. But it is merely negative and does not speak specifically in favor of the authors' own approach.

Jost and Jost neglect Marx's *empiricism directed towards conceptualization* and object analysis and its methodological foundation. German Critical Psychology, on the other hand, attaches great importance to it (cf. Markard, 2017) which, in turn, leads to a different foundation of empirical research. The result of the object analysis of critical psychology and its methodological implications is in a nutshell¹⁵: Societal *conditions* are *possibilities (and impediments)* to act from the standpoint of the subject. Individuals are not determined in their concrete action. They rather must develop in these conditions, relate to the conditions, participate in them and produce them in order to exist. In doing so, they reproduce and change these conditions (albeit to varying degrees, some of which may be barely noticeable). Rather than of "stimulus" or "environment" GCP speaks of a historically collectively produced, meaningful, societal world when dealing with psychological issues at a decidedly human level. The individuals' *objective* possibilities to act¹⁶ are subjectively perceived and appropriated as *premises* of each individual's own action. According to GCP, individuals act within this 'framework' of objective possibilities to act in a way that is subjectively grounded or based on "subjective reasons for action" (Holzkamp, 2013, p. 47). "Based on subjective reasons" in this sense does not mean 'rational' or conscious (but can be made conscious; Holzkamp, 1986, pp. 227). Instead, it designates a certain 'mode' of *mediatedness* ("Vermitteltheit") between the individual and the world that is qualitatively distinct from the notion that the environment or stimuli *condition* behavior, that behavior is the *effect* of stimuli (in the sense of a stimulus-response relation). This mediation level ("Vermittlungsebene") of reasonable action, according to GCP, is the standard

¹⁵ For more details see Holzkamp, 1985; and also Markard, 2012; in English e.g. Holzkamp, 1992; C. Tolman, 2013, but currently there are more key texts in translation.

¹⁶ In this context, for Critical Psychology, there is the *psychological* necessity of an analysis of social conditions, noted above as a desideratum of SJT. In terms of GCP: analysis of meaning structures.

basis of societally mediated individual existence. Therefore, GCP regards the associated so-called “reason discourse” (Holzkamp, 2013, p. 47) as the linguistic basis of psychological theory that is required to formulate theory and hypotheses addressing specifically human psychology. In the instead common “conditioning discourse” (ibid.) and its empirical discussion, crucial factors are neglected: *subjective determination* (vs. objective determinacy) and the *mediatedness of individual action (through reason and objective possibilities for action)* with the societal process.

Misinterpreting reasons for action in social psychology & the reason discourse as a medium of psychological theories.

From the perspective of Critical Psychology, a fundamental critique of social psychology by Klaus Holzkamp can be applied to the ‘empirical half’ of SJT: the misinterpreting of reasons for action (Holzkamp, 1986; 2013). According to this critique, social psychology errs when it assumes contingent, testable effects of the world on human action as an if-then statements. Furthermore, the theoretical considerations of social psychology would, in actuality, even if only *implicitly*, presuppose subjective reasons for actions¹⁷ as the relation between ‘stimuli’. As a consequence, according to Holzkamp's argumentation, the hypotheses of such theories do not deal with contingent conditionalities. Instead, they ‘only’ deal with an *example of* a connection between a) individual interpretations of the possibilities to act in a societally embedded situation (premises) and b) subjective reasons for action. Holzkamp calls these connections of premises and reasons “reason pattern” (1986, p. 221; 2013 p. 50). Reason patterns, he argues, are the standard mode of mediatedness of the world and individual actions in human psychology.

What this can mean for theorizing (i.e., also interpreting data) is illustrated by the example below.

Reason patterns in a study on “System-Sanctioned Change”.

In the study by Feygina, Jost, and Goldsmith (2010), correlational and experimental questionnaire studies are conducted that address attitudes towards a) the climate crisis and b) possible counter measures. In particular, a focus is placed on whether climate action is seen as a threat to the existing “system”, which would be in line with a typical reaction of SJ. The concept of *system sanctioned change*, however, attempts to frame the introduction of stronger climate action (i.e. societal change) as being in accordance with the (spirit of the) status quo. In the questionnaire of the experimental group, this idea is

¹⁷ Motivated cognition can often easily be reformulated as grounded in subjective reasons. Because it is also categorically based on the fact that a certain thought (in the social context) is formed on a certain motive or need basis: *In order to achieve something*, something is thought and done.

implemented in such a way that climate protection/environmental protection is framed as patriotic. The authors try to find out whether this can cancel out the known effects of SJ on climate change denialism and opinions on environmental behavior.

The examined context of the study can be reformulated in the reason discourse. The interpretation of the study is: *if reframing, then acceptance*. However, the research hypotheses actually implies that a certain reaction will be shown to be *subjectively reasonable*: *if* pro-environmental statements subjectively fit their own political opinion and purposes (e.g. patriotism)¹⁸, *then* they *reasonably* (!) experience stronger approval. A contrary case would be theoretically and subjectively unsound.¹⁹ This is why the empirical relation could not be grasped by contingent if-then statements. It is rather be represented by “linguistic-implicative (i.e. in the widest sense, “definitional”) statements” (Holzkamp, 2013, p. 51). The consequence of this for psychological methodology is that the relation of world and psyche cannot be comprehended in the “conditioning discourse” (ibid., p. 47), that is, of effect. Thus, effect can no longer be *tested*. Consequentially, the premise of scientific procedure of fallibilistic theory production that is based on testing would be called into question by the implicit theory common in social psychology. Assuming that reason patterns are adequate, empiricism deals with analyzing exemplary cases of ‘application’ of theories instead of testing them. Reason patterns are nevertheless not obvious, not even to the subject that acts based on them. Their reconstruction is demanding and needs a certain amount of scientific (psychological) knowledge.

In the context of the experiment, one could also further investigate how questionnaire items themselves are interpreted in the first place and why people answer in the way they do. Since the reason discourse formulates a specific ‘mode of mediatedness’ for psychology, this approach would go beyond a social psychology of the experiment.

In SJT, this study and its idea of reframing is cited several times when discussing SJT-based intervention options (J. T. Jost, 2015, 2016, 2020; J. T. Jost et al., 2015, 2018). My discussion of the study gives an idea why the application of its results might be problematic. A further reservation towards this: the study was not an “applied experiment”²⁰ by conventional measures. Thus, no statement

¹⁸ More general: If subjects adopt the manipulation as premise of their actions, in the way intended by the researchers

¹⁹ If the study were to show that national framing tends to have no consequences, this would not contribute to the verification of the original hypothesis. It would ‘only’ not have found an example of it. E.g., because the concerns about short-term national competitiveness were too serious for the manipulation to be convincing (this style of thinking that is also used in exhaustion attempts is indicative of the reason discourse applying). If both reason patterns were found with different frequency, the more frequent pattern would not disprove the less frequent. They would be two examples of reason patterns that are not necessarily in competition.

²⁰ An experiment (or correlation study) tests the theory. Only the theory, not directly the case studied in the experiment, serves to interpret and process the real world (Mook, 1983, S. 380; Wilson et al., 2010). This is also described by Douglas M. Mook in 1983 in his widely cited methodological essay “In Defense Of External Invalidity”. He distinguishes, first, the experiments that do not want or need to be externally valid. They serve the purpose of finding conditions that can show that a theory does not (always) hold. Second, he speaks of “applied experiments” (p. 380): “The experimental setting resembles, or is a special

about the “real world” is substantiated with it. The preconditions of application and transfer were not investigated and hardly discussed²¹.

Outside of the need to found a contingent relationship for a journal, the reframing-approach can also be viewed more circumspectly:

“There is a danger here of playing word games, avoiding the ‘real’ issues, and postponing necessary sacrifices, but-from a practical perspective-it would be foolish to ignore powerful forces of ideological defensiveness [TD: i.e. SJ] [...]” (Jost, 2020, p. 246)

Concretizing Reason patterns in the context of SJT

Empirical studies could deal with the problem unfolded above by concretizing their objects of research as reason patterns. This possibility is hinted at in a rare qualitative study in the context of SJT by Godfrey and Wolf (2016). Here, the complexity and contradictoriness of individual attitudes toward the status quo are revealed. The empirical data flesh out this contradictoriness in exemplary ways: poor ethnic minority women name structural causes of poverty yet blame the poor themselves; sometimes in the same train of thought (ibid., p. 99). The more precise subjective backgrounds remain speculative because the data is only interpreted by the researchers ‘from the outside’. Nevertheless, the study provides relevant impulses for SJT. And it does so precisely by providing indications of *possibly given/available* reason patterns.

The contradictoriness and changeability in individual consciousness could, for example, indicate that the complementary relationship of SJT and SIT (and other theories, see e.g. Jost 2019, p. 285) could be conceived of and researched as interchangeable modes *within* individual subjectivity in the very same situation. The reason discourse provides an obvious basis for this, but one that leads away from current methodological paradigms and brings with it new methodological problems different from those already faced by (social) psychology.

C: Misunderstandings in the reception of SJT

What sets apart SJT from other approaches is mainstream social psychology is that SJT allows itself some ‘degrees of freedom’ to incorporate theories on politics and history that partly shape the formulation of hypotheses and interpretations in SJT. Accordingly, SJT formulates some *historically-relative hypotheses* instead of *universal statements that are strictly falsifiable*. In the

case of, a real-life setting in which one wants to know what to do” (ibid.). These specifically try to address the transfer to real-world situations.

²¹ Whether such a framing would be socially effective is, for example, a question of power relations: in acute social conflict situations, in which environmental protection is possibly also an established enemy stereotype, the reframing attempts of moderate reformers are probably quickly seen through as an attempt at manipulation. In the debate within the SJT, which is mainly focused on empirical research, this discussion given here is a gap, even if I assume that authors of the SJT are easily capable of filling it.

‘mainstream’ reception of SJT several misunderstandings happened because more narrowly fallibilistically oriented colleagues or competitors tend to have difficulties with understanding these ‘degrees of freedom’ when engaging in debate with the SJT.

This can be seen in the discussion of the “strong” SJ hypothesis (J. T. Jost, Pelham, et al., 2003). It states that disadvantaged groups legitimize the system to a greater extent than dominant groups. According to cognitive dissonance, they thereby psychically compensate for the fact that they gain little material advantage from their SJ. According to Jost et al., however, group- and self-related motives usually stand in the way of this phenomenon. This means it will *not always* manifest itself. Their study should only *demonstrate* that the effect is *possible* (ibid. p. 17). The hypothesis was partly assumed by proponents of other theories to be theoretically central for SJT. Thus, an attempt was made to refute SJT as a whole by challenging this hypothesis in the sense of a competition of theories. The theoretical classification by the SJT was not taken into account (J. T. Jost, 2019, p. 282).

An explicit historicization of the subject of SJT is illustrated by Jost and Banaji’s statement that “One potential trigger [sic!] of the system-justification response might be the absence of a revolutionary ‘class consciousness’” (1994, p. 16)

In the debate on conservatism as motivated cognition (started by J. T. Jost, Glaser, et al., 2003), the critique of SJT again failed to consider the theoretical elaborations. Instead, it referred solely to a narrowly understood, formalist core definition of conservatism: pro inequality and contra change. This made restorative, reactionary movements appear to Greenberg and Jonas (2003) as ‘*pro change* conservatives’ and thus counter-examples. They miss that Jost, Glaser et al. (implicitly) assumed a scope that takes into account historical power relations and developmental trends (2003). Thereby revealing the *restorative* and in this sense ‘pro-(old)-system’ character of these movements.

Other than that, the given historical relativity in the definition of conservatism points to a limitation regarding the settling of this question with a simple, falsifiable hypothesis and ensuing empirical evidence. Such an attempt produces an empiricist misunderstanding: the observation that conservatives are more inclined (in a historically contextualized way) to SJ is in fact a *definitional relation* that is treated as if it were empirically open. But supposed conservatives who deviate substantially from this relation would only evidence their idiosyncratic definition of conservativeness.

It is certainly of interest to investigate how (e.g. motives, interests, etc.) conservatism arises and exists, which manifestations and nuances and developmental potentials it has. But: In such politically charged areas one will not be able to reconcile scientific neutrality, the non-binding nature of freedom of opinion and political ideological criticism, as the SJT sometimes tries to do. Political arguments cannot be settled with the ‘neutral’ scientific proof that conservatism is somehow wrong, narrow-minded or stupid. Jost in a way implies this himself: he attributes the social scientific question of whether leftists are not equally rigid and conformist as rightists to a neoconservative intervention in

social science (Jost, 2006, p. 667). The existence and relevance of the question in scientific discourse is thus dependent on the power of certain political interests-groups to intervene – it is as Holzkamp put it “the ideational aspect of societal class struggles” (1985, p. 31).

Discussion: Two types of theory, partly blurring

According to my analysis, SJT consists of a fallibilist psychology and a more social science-based psychology and social theory.

The former tends towards more clearly falsifiable hypotheses. Methodologically, it clearly holds the upper hand within SJT. ‘Alternative’ methodological approaches are prematurely rejected in SJT (L. J. Jost & Jost, 2007). The results produced here that are discussed regarding their application are too simplistic; e.g., ‘system sanctioned change’ (Feygina et al., 2010). Nevertheless, SJT raises crucial questions about the obstacles to responses to societal crisis and its results are worth discussing; especially in the context of efforts trying to further the (thus far insufficient) theoretical synthesis.

However, the SJT's hypothesis formulation sometimes fails to be fallibilistic. On the one hand due to a common tendency that wants to confirm hypotheses rather than to reject them. On the other hand, this can be explained by a historical and analytical ‘intuition’ of the research subject pushing through from the ‘theoretical half’ of the theory (see below). This results in existential hypotheses with a historical expiration date: according to SJT, whether and how strongly disadvantaged groups react with SJ is also an expression of societal power relations that cannot (be) clearly determined. SJ can *simultaneously* have both a palliative function and be self-damaging. Whether something is a system or group is context dependent; whether a group(-identity) is primarily a case of false consciousness is up for debate. This ‘blurring’ allows SJT to retain theoretically complex relations and concepts and a ‘sense of historicity’ to some extent, and to ask interesting questions. However, this blurring poses challenges to operationalization that more rigorous mainstream methodologists misunderstand.

The second, ‘more theoretical theory’ considers more complex relations and has an inkling that its own object of research depends on historical power relations. It relates to (not easily measurable) objective interests and uses concepts that have an analytical function rather than one of operationalization and measurement. These ‘second theory’ aspects are exceptional for a mainstream psychological theory. However, they are not sufficiently explicated.

The unclear relation between the two halves causes theoretical problems resulting in unnoticed duplications of the conceptual terminology: SJ can be understood as *analytical* concretization of false consciousness in SJT; then reflecting different levels/qualities of interest reference and their contradictory interrelation (even within individual actions). Where SJT treats SJ *as a measurable variable*, however, SJ loses the clear reference to objective interests. This unresolved difference between ‘analytical SJ’ and ‘SJ as a variable’ leads to

unclear statements. For example, the thesis that SJ cannot be motivated by genuine self-interest in marginalized people is understandable on a categorical level, but less understandable in relation to empirically present actions.

It is also clear to the theoretical half that there is a problem of intervention capability for the other (empirical) half. With its proposals of discourse intervention, it cannot reach the historical scale in the experiment. This scale, however, would be the prerequisite of societal change becoming a realistic possibility of collective practice (i.e. not merely symbolic). How to transfer present results to other historical circumstances remains an unresolved challenge.

Insofar as one agrees that relevant aspects (or, as I have assumed, with false consciousness even a constituent category) of SJT are located in the ‘second half’, SJT has a problem in its communicability. This is because these aspects are not explicated clearly enough. I assume that the perspective of GCP could help SJT reflect on its approach to its subject matter in terms of its own epistemic intention. At the same time, GCP also poses a challenge that makes it difficult to remain in the psychological mainstream.

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Afrophobic hypernationalism: Unpacking the anti-black logic of #PutSouthAfricansFirst

Suntosh R. Pillay

Abstract

There is persistent xenophobia in South Africa and social media is used to promote negative stereotypes against migrant communities. The hashtag #PutSouthAfricansFirst expresses anger at the perception that foreigners are criminals and ‘steal jobs’ from locals. Social media is a dialogic site of micro- and macro meaning-making, identity formation, and ideological contestation. Online and offline communities are mutually constitutive, as intersecting discursive spaces that (re)produce, amplify, and resist nationalist discourse on the treatment of migrants and citizens. Using a reflexive, quasi-ethnographic approach, I conducted a critical discourse analysis of a related Twitter (X) discussion. I unpack these racialized utterances to understand their psychopolitical positioning within a context of enduring coloniality. I identify four intersecting discourses that prop up xenophobia: patriotic citizenship; law and order; localised marginality; and pre-colonial indigeneity. In a context of poverty, inequality, and unemployment, I argue that these discursive tensions contribute to a violent meta-discourse of ‘Afrophobic hypernationalism’, which locates itself within a historically divisive, anti-black ontology that perpetuates an apartheid-era logic, in which hierarchies of blackness are reinforced and discursively justified with great speed by anonymous social media communities.

Keywords

Afrophobia, coloniality, nationalism, social media, South Africa, xenophobia

Introduction

Rising xenophobia across South Africa intersects with diverse psychosocial, economic, historical, and political factors (Akinola, 2018). Cross-border migrants¹ are consistently the target of negative prejudice and stereotypes

¹ There is unresolved practical and conceptual debate on terminology. I am opting to use the umbrella term ‘migrant’ (see UNDESA, 2020) to refer to all documented and undocumented foreign nationals, stateless people, refugees, asylum seekers, and economic migrants, from countries outside of South Africa currently residing in South Africa. The discourse in South Africa more often uses the term ‘foreigners’.

(Gordon, 2015). In March 2019, President Cyril Ramaphosa launched the 'National Action Plan to Combat Racism, Racial Discrimination, Xenophobia and Related Intolerance'. Yet, anti-migrant attitudes flourish (Human Rights Watch, 2020), especially on social media (Mpofu & Barnabas, 2016; Lunga, 2021). In 2020, the hashtags #PutSouthAfricansFirst and #WeWantOurCountryBack expressed anger at rising unemployment and the perception that migrants 'steal' jobs from locals. Given South Africa's history of brutal violence towards migrants (Valji, 2003) and global anti-immigrant discourse (Kreis, 2017), these phrases were not innocuous expressions of frustration.

In keeping with a critical social justice orientation, and decolonial imperatives, some South African psychologists increasingly participate in these public debates, moving away from 'neutral' positions that prevent psychologists from taking public positions on controversial social issues. To disrupt this hegemony of 'neutrality', some psychologists – myself included – now speak beyond academia and engage actively in mainstream- and social media, in line with a critical psychology position that silence – in the context of injustices – is an act of violence itself (SR Pillay, 2016). Increasingly, the internet is “the scene of politics” and social media is its most accessible mode of engagement (Çetinkaya, 2020). There were 22 million active social media users by July 2020 in South Africa (37% of the population) (TalkWalker, 2020).

Within this context I chose to personally intervene on Twitter (now called X) by posting a brief critique² against xenophobia. I felt that a discourse to put South Africans 'first' and an interpellation into the bravado of ethno-nationalism would quickly translate into mob violence. Indeed, our “identitarian dysfunctionality” often manifests as “a uniquely South African hostility towards other African immigrants” (Lamola, 2018, p.72). I tweeted my misgivings on January 2, 2021. It read:

#WeWantOurCountryBack and #PutSouthAfricansFirst reinforce a vocabulary of violence. These xenophobic, fascist, hyper-nationalist slogans drive lazy scapegoating of 'ethnic others'. History warns us what happens next.

Most replies were explicitly xenophobic and racist, fuelling a “discursive spiral of hate” that social media tends to evoke and enable (Kopytowska, Grabowski, & Woźniak, 2017, p.68). In this article, I offer a critical discourse analysis of this ensuing online discussion. I contend that this is a valuable mode and site of analysis for three reasons.

Firstly, there is a lack of autoethnographic approaches researching racism, xenophobia, and nationalism, due to the obstinate illusion of political neutrality. I am deliberately embedding myself into this analysis vis-à-vis my participation and provocations in the tweets under investigation, parting ways from existing scholarship on social media and prejudice that renders the researcher invisible (Matamoros-Fernández & Farkas, 2021). Insofar as an autoethnographic lens

² As a micro-blogging app, a single tweet only allows 280 *characters*. Posts must therefore be succinct and catchy.

“lets you use yourself to get to culture” (Pelias, 2003, p.372), I explore the cultures of racism, xenophobia and nationalism that are amplified on Twitter. This disrupts supposedly ‘objective’ (conservative, mainstream) analytic frames, enabling a nuanced, embedded, situated political subjectivity in academia. Secondly, social media is a dialogic site of micro- and macro meaning-making, identity formation, and ideological contestation (KhosraviNik & Esposito, 2018). Online and offline communities are mutually constitutive (Bouvier, 2015), as intersecting discursive spaces that (re)produce, amplify, and resist nationalist discourse and political positions on the treatment of migrants and citizens. An analysis that explores these psychopolitical realities can improve our understanding of these layered and entangled sites of meaning-making (Kopytowska et al., 2017). Thirdly, I theorize the intersectional violence of racism, nationalism, xenophobia, patriarchy, and coloniality in South Africa, by proposing a model of ‘Afrophobic Hypernationalism’.

(Re)Articulations of anti-black racism

‘How did it come to pass that in the imagination of an African nation [South Africa], Africa and Africans represent the negativity of Otherness?’ - Matsinhe (2011, p.298)

An obvious starting point for any analysis of social friction in South Africa is race. ‘Race’ haunts our lives despite the formal end of apartheid in 1994. ‘Race trouble’ naturalizes itself into daily discourse (Durrheim, Mtose & Brown, 2011). Our failure – or resistance – to evolve from, or undo, colonial categories of racialised subjectivity has left us without exit points to make sense of our identities (Maré, 2014). Despite disrupting white political rule, post-1994 life has achieved neither its early romantic notions of racial reconciliation, nor its pragmatic plans of black economic empowerment. Almost three decades later, the inscription of black poverty as a normative condition of black existence reinforces the anti-black ontology of colonialism and apartheid. Khanyile (2019, p.2) offers an apt provocation:

I would like to persuade you to consider the possibility that we, Black and Brown people, living in South Africa today are not living in a post-apartheid society. We are living, instead, in an advanced stage of economic and racial domination that began in 1652 shortly after the arrival of Jan Van Riebeeck in the Cape.

Drawing on the work of Anthony Borges’ theory of how repetitive historical trauma creates catastrophic social, bodily, and psychic wounds, Khanyile (2019) argues that these wounds have warped the identities of Black and Brown³ people in South Africa, rupturing and perverting relationships with each other. Despite a post-1994 discourse of ‘freedom’, he asks, “Why though, do our historical

³ Brown includes South Africans classified as Coloured (mixed race) and of Indian/Eastern/Asian ancestry. Both these ‘Brown’ categories have complex sociohistorical genealogies and are used, contested, (re)constructed, and problematized in multiple ways.

wounds still gape and ache and our scabs itch as if we are still living under the sword of racial domination?" (p.7).

When black citizens gained political power in South Africa through the democratic election of the African National Congress (ANC) in 1994, the 'new' nation-state emerged as a proud symbol of collective black identity and as an opportunity to speak back to- and resist coloniality. With Nelson Mandela as president, his globally iconic status ushered in a discourse of exceptionalism, to distinguish 'us' from 'other' failed post-colonial countries (Matsinhe, 2011). This optimistic feeling of political security shifted our collective gaze outwards, beyond our borders, in search of new threats. Through this paranoid turn, people who threatened the quasi-stability and quasi-freedoms of our promising nation-state were constructed as the new enemy⁴ (see Neocosmos, 2010, for a detailed account of this state-driven discourse of nationalist exclusivism).

Nyamnjoh (2006, p.1) argues that the anxieties of globalisation also catalysed "an obsession with citizenship and belonging and the re-actualization of boundaries through xenophobia". Ironically, the hegemony of whiteness and its invisible economic power meant that the objects of this paranoia became the *obviously visible*: displaced black Africans fleeing Other⁵ countries. As coloniality at work, this anti-black self-hatred reinscribed *die swart gevaar*⁶. Amusan and Mchunu (2017, p.10) note:

Caucasian foreigners are perceived and accepted as 'tourists' and 'investors' who have everything positive to offer South Africa, while African foreigners are perceived and rejected as 'makwerekweres', 'throw-aways' and *personae non gratae*...

Despite Africa's collective wounding from colonialism and warnings from Fanon (1964) and Biko (1978) about the dangers of fragmentation amongst black people, the nervous conditions of 'post' apartheid life favoured paranoia instead of solidarity. The foundational myth of a 'rainbow nation' became a discursive proxy for an emboldened ethno-nationalist identity (Valji, 2003). Symbolic boundary-making became interwoven with social identity. These psychosocial arrangements were iterations of positive ingroup bias and outgroup hostility, seen routinely in the social psychology of intergroup relations. As many African countries struggled to achieve stability, erupting into civil wars, violent tribalism, or financial collapse, thousands of Africans fled their home countries and came into ours, as a matter of survival, to benefit from the opportunities being created by the influx of global capital into the 'new' South Africa. Compared to 49.6 million South Africans, two million migrants were recorded in the 2011 census, most being black African (71.7%), mostly from Zimbabwe and Mozambique, and 4.2% of Asian ethnicity, mostly from Pakistan and Bangladesh (Statistics

⁴ Scholars like Biney (2018) attempt to curb historical amnesia, by writing about the role African countries played in the anti-apartheid struggle.

⁵ I deliberately capitalize Other to signify the *othering* processes in our construction of *other Africans*, i.e., those who are not South African.

⁶ *Die swart gevaar* is an Afrikaans term for 'the black danger' – a phrase used during apartheid to describe racist fears and anxieties felt by white South Africans towards black South Africans.

SA, 2012)⁷. This created a perfect storm: a context wherein historically wounded black South Africans with new psychosocial and political power, encountered a group of wounded Others without such power. Post-1994, Congolese and Nigerian migrants complained that South Africans “make our lives hell” (Morris, 1998, p.1116). A new hierarchy emerged – one which stratified black Africans based on nationality, ironically maintaining an anti-black ontology.

South Africa soon developed the highest rate of anti-immigration bias in the world (Mattes et al., 1999) and during 2003–2012, African nationals were consistently identified as the most undesirable migrants, with Nigerians being most disliked (Gordon, 2015). For these reasons, some scholars theorize South Africa’s brand of xenophobia as Afrophobia (Lamola, 2018), to enunciate the particular prejudice against black Africans⁸ – an easy target for misplaced “pent up anger and frustration” at continued poverty (Wilson & Magam, 2018, p.103).

Afrophobia fuels anti-black prejudice against African migrants as a divisive colonial continuity. Grosfugel (2004, p.325) is instructive here when he argues that “there is no ‘post’ in colonial/racial hierarchies in the world today. Instead, there are cultural and political processes that reproduce a ‘colonial situation’ without the presence of a ‘colonial administration’”. He argues such continuities are “not fundamentally about skin colour but about a location within a colonial relationship” because “social power today is still informed by criteria built over a long colonial history” (Grosfugel, 2004, p.328). Such prejudices by black South Africans against black African nationals reproduce this colonial anti-black ontology, repurposing racist hierarchies from colonialism and apartheid.

Afrophobic myths

A common stereotype is that ‘foreigners steal our jobs’. South African news media fuel these moral panics (Banda & Mawadza, 2015; Moyo & Mpofu, 2020) and are used in electioneering by political parties such as the Patriotic Alliance. However, Chaskalson’s (2017) analysis refutes this Afrophobic myth. Using the 2011 census data, his regression models show that migrants are *creating* jobs at the lower levels (e.g., as cleaners, labourers, factory workers), albeit at tiny percentages. However, as the level of skill or education needed for a job increases, migrants may be preferred in some sectors, such as sales, services, and other professional industries (again, at only between 0.03 – 0.1%). More often, migrants are entrepreneurial.

In a study in Cape Town, Kalitanyi and Visser (2010) found that 82% of 120 African migrants *employ* South Africans in their businesses and transfer entrepreneurial skills to their South African employees. The Global Entrepreneurship Monitor South Africa (GEM SA) 2019/2020 report found that business ownership rates increased from 2.2% in 2017 to a mere 3.5% in 2019, far below the average for other African countries and developing nations. Vandoor

⁷ Updated census statistics were released while this paper was in press. See StatsSA (2023).

⁸ Others have challenged this hypothesis (e.g., Freeman, 2020; Tewolde, 2019) or called for a more nuanced analysis (e.g., Dube, 2018). For the purposes of this article, Afrophobia makes conceptual sense.

and Frank (2016) suggest that “public money may be better spent on building incubators for migrant entrepreneurs than on building border walls”. Unsurprisingly, we rank 119 out of 141 in terms of the quality of our education system, according to the Global Competitiveness Index 2019/2020. The South African 2011 census data also shows that although migrants and locals have similar years of schooling, more migrants have a tertiary education compared to locals (Chaskalson, 2017). Despite these statistics, Afrophobic myths endure, cause mental distress amongst migrants (Thela et al., 2018) and erupt into acts of physical violence.

Inequality, desperation and violence

The gruesome lynching of Mozambican national, Ernesto Alfabeto Nhamuave, symbolizes the atrocities endorsed by Afrophobia, which flared up like raging wildfire in May 2008. Nhamauve was stabbed, beaten, and set alight by South African men in a township called Ramaphosa, in Gauteng province. Over 60 people were killed, including locals, and 100 000 people displaced in two weeks (Hassim, Kope & Worby, 2008). Photographs of “the burning man” stain our collective memory and remove any illusions of exceptionalism propped up by nationalist mythologies. Hopes for an inclusive ‘rainbow’ citizenship – as promised in our progressive Constitution – were all but shattered (Mupotsa & Kreutzfeldt, 2016).

However, violence is often an expression of economic desperation in South Africa, which holds the notorious label of being the most unequal country in the world (UNDP, 2014). Swiftly betrayed by broken political promises, alienated black citizens are understandably frustrated: 49.2% of the country lives in poverty (Statistics SA, 2015), wealth remains firmly racialized and dominated by a white minority (Anwar, 2017), and unemployment is at 42% (Stats SA, 2020a). Afrophobic violence – discursive and physical – can be located within this matrix of colonial continuities that keep most black South Africans stuck in contexts of desperate hopelessness.

This inequality fuels hostile inter-group relations (Mamabolo, 2015) and our crime levels bear testament to this: between April 2019 and March 2020, there were 21 325 reported murders, 18 635 attempted murders, 53 293 sexual offences, 165 494 assaults, 51 825 common robberies, 59 883 cases of shop lifting, 46 921 vehicle robberies, and 205 595 burglaries at people’s homes (SAPS, 2020). With a murder rate of 35.8 per 100 000 population, interpersonal violence also shapes processes of identity formation (Judge, 2018).

In the context of the COVID-19 pandemic, South Africa shed 671 000 jobs (-6,6%) in June 2020 compared with June 2019 (Statistics SA, 2020b). Between the first and second quarter of 2020, the number of employed persons decreased by 2,2 million, causing a 2.3% higher unemployment rate of 42% and a youth unemployment rate of 55% (Statistics SA, 2020b).

Yet, South Africa remains a relatively attractive destination for migrants. Recent reports estimate that 4.8% of South Africa's population are migrants (i.e.,

2.8 million people at a median age of 34) (UNDESA, 2020). The majority of immigrants are male and young adults aged 20–44 (Statistics SA, 2023). Political stability, better socioeconomic opportunities relative to Other African countries, temperate geographic climate, porous borders, and a progressive Constitution and Bill of Rights, epitomizes a country of paradoxes: of poverty and possibility. However, Afrophobia – like coloniality and racism – is discursively resilient and mutated onto social media in 2020 under the hashtag #PutSouthAfricansFirst. This became the tenth most trending phrase by July 2020, with 414 400 mentions across varied social media, according to TalkWalker.com, a private company that tracks social media trends. By comparison, the number one most trending phrase was # COVID19, with 1.3 million mentions (TalkWalker, 2020).

Against this socio-historical background I return to my initial Tweet and the online reaction it generated, as this forms the central pivot of my inquiry. The explicit – even proud – Afrophobia, racism, and echo chamber of rage provoked by my post is an exemplar of the discursive hate that often precedes physical violence. As a point of inquiry, my aim was to explore the discourses informing these utterances and understand their positioning within a context of coloniality.

Methods

Design and data collection

This was a retrospective, quasi-ethnographic, naturalistic observation study of digital discourse on Twitter, a publically accessible social media platform. The dataset was a discussion thread I generated by critiquing the #PutSouthAfricansFirst hashtag. The Tweet had a modest reception. By March 2, 2021, the tweet was seen by 14 485 people and had 771 engagements, including 33 retweets, 71 likes, and 34 replies. At this point, two months later, all engagement had stopped and I formally saved the responses for analysis.

Data analysis

In keeping with a social constructionist epistemological position, I used a critical discourse analysis (CDA) approach to analyse the data. CDA focuses on the “semiotic dimensions of power, injustice, abuse, and political-economic or cultural change in society” and unpacks how language is used to construct particular social realities and inequalities as self-evident, thereby (re)producing relations of power and self/other (re)presentations (Fairclough, Mulderrig & Wodak, 2011, p.357). By focusing on a single discussion thread, it enabled an interactional but contextualised account of how identities and positionalities come to be discursively constructed in emotionally contested online communities (Bouvier, 2015).

Ethics

The ethics of this study is embedded in a range of uneven power dynamics afforded to me by my intersecting positions as participant/observer, researcher, and author. Ethical tensions arose as I made inferences, assumptions, and value-judgments about the data. I imagine that some Twitter users may have reservations about their tweets coming under scrutiny, despite them freely engaging in a public platform whose very purpose is to solicit observation and attention. Given the heated public exchange that took place, my ‘final’ position as author(ity) renders this analysis in need of continuous reflexivity, despite using data in a public domain.

Reflexivity

The choice of focusing in depth on a single Twitter exchange that I had personally started, and I am embedded and implicated in, renders my own identity and politics pertinent. This autoethnographic gaze foregrounds constructions of (my)self and its entangled interactions with others within a socio-historical context. Self-reflexivity, despite its ability to enrich a CDA, is missing in most research on racism and social media (Matamoros-Fernández & Farkas, 2021). I offer some reflections on how others who may not personally know me could potentially have ‘read’ my online identity when engaging with me.

I am a South African cisgender man of historical Indian ancestry (fourth generation, born and raised in South Africa) and would be easily ‘raced’ as Indian based on my full name and picture on Twitter. My profile has a ‘blue tick’, showing others that Twitter has verified me as a real person (this was prior to blue ticks being a purchasable commodity). I had about 5000 ‘followers’. I self-described as a psychologist and researcher living in Durban. People could correctly estimate my age and could position me as middle class based on my profession and related assumptions. One could Google my name if they wanted to know more. My politics are therefore accessible to anyone wanting to engage further. I am not a ‘blank slate’ but my online identity is curated as professional. The option to directly message is available for private dialogue. Against my own background of writing and voicing socio-political commentary in the media for over 15 years, I have developed a ‘thick skin’ for public criticism, and I am not easily incited or triggered by provocative feedback, discerningly choosing the types of public dialogue I consider valuable. However, given the subject matter and the politics of difference across a greatly unequal society, my socio-economic privilege cautioned me to proceed with “methodological humility” (Narayan, 1988, p.37).

Findings

I identify and discuss four intersecting discourses that are embedded in the data: (1) patriotic citizenship, (2) law and order, (3) localised marginalities, and (4) pre-colonial indigeneity. I demonstrate and argue, overall, that these discursive tensions contribute to an emerging meta-discourse of ‘Afrophobic hypernationalism’.

(1) Patriotic citizenship

A dominant response to my critique of #PutSouthAfricansFirst was for respondents to (re)frame the hashtag as nationalistic duty and pride, drawing on a discourse of patriotic citizenship to counter accusations of xenophobia. In this brief exchange, a user called ‘Wisani’ who self-describes as ‘A Patriotic South African and A Humanist’ bemoans the constraints placed on him for expressing his patriotism, supported by Tshepo and Alunamda⁹.

Wisani: You see SAns. Being a patriot in your own Country is illegal. Very Sad!!

Author: Patriotism and xenophobia are two different things.

Wisani: but you people seem to confuse the two words

Tshepo: Patriotism puts citizens first

Alunamda: That is very much clear. Seems like you are the one who had difficulty understanding the two

Wisani’s interpellation of South Africans (“You see SAns”) serves to distance my identity as a South African – despite writing in direct reply to my tweet, he does not address his reply to me, and in his second response refers to me as “you people”. This Othering effect constructs me as outside citizenship, given my perceived lack of patriotism (or, as I later discuss, based on the precarity of Indian identity in South Africa). By discursively revoking my right to speak as a citizen, Wisani uses my Tweet to decry how “being a patriot” is “illegal” – an ironic attempt to reconstruct my criticism as a violation of *his* legal right to freedom of expression. When I point out that patriotism and xenophobia are “two different things” he counters with the exact criticism, that I am confusing “the two words”. Alunamda supports him and Tsepho offers a definition of patriotism that “puts citizens first” – implying that citizens are not currently prioritized. Wisani’s defeatist expression of “Very sad!!” is an affective strategy drawing on a cultural politics of emotion (Ahmed, 2004), accentuating emotional attachments to nationalism. Lefa attempts a similar strategy:

Lefa: Mr.Pillay, you should not be opposing this campaign. You should be a part of it as a patriot. Your sympathies are misplaced

⁹ All tweets have been reposted verbatim, with spelling, formatting, and grammar errors, etc. to preserve the ethnographic element of this investigation. Where some clarity is needed, it is corrected for in parentheses.

By inviting me to join “this campaign” as “a patriot”, Lefa is clarifying the limits of where a patriot’s “sympathies” must lie, by suggesting that my emotional positioning alongside migrants is “misplaced” and therefore unpatriotic. A discursive binary is constructed between sympathetic, supportive patriots (citizens) and unsympathetic, oppositional traitors (non-citizens). Read in isolation, it may appear that Lefa is at least addressing me as a fellow South African, but as I later show, Lefa’s strategy includes a paradoxical mix of racist exclusion and ethno-nationalist inclusion. Defiantly, some people called themselves “proud xenophobes” and made no attempt to reframe their feelings as misunderstood patriotism.

Blizzard: Was watching this documentary on Al Jazeera ryt now about Hungarians they too are tired of immigrants from Germany, Russia etc and nobody calls them xenophobic

Author: Yeah, people rarely see xenophobia, tribalism, racism, etc. for what it is until its too late. Germany, Rwanda, Burundi, Uganda, Cambodia, Myanmar, Kashmiri... The list is endless.

Blizzard: You tell us what it is then. We don't care anymore we are proud xenophobes

Blizzard’s comments are unsurprising and capture the localized iterations of a global phenomenon. Unquestioning patriotism has become a major dividing line in political discourse around the world. For example, there are similarities with the phrase #PutSouthAfricansFirst and #AmericaFirst – the latter being the official foreign policy position of the United States under Donald Trump, and the theme of both his presidential campaign and his inaugural address in 2016. Trump’s use of Twitter as his primary means of public communication is implicated in bolstering his “politics of debasement” (Ott, 2017). Indeed, if the medium *is* the message (McLuhan, 1967), the rise of anti-immigrant propaganda cannot be separated from the immediacy and ubiquity of Twitter. Trump’s explicitly xenophobic and isolationist approach to American nationalism was fuelled by a hyper-instant social media platform that imperialised global political discourse, as more and more countries retreated into itself by reasserting their borders and identities – seen dramatically after the 2016 Brexit vote and the UK’s authoritarian turn (Webber, 2021). A discourse of patriotic citizenship therefore finds fertility in xenophobic utterances and right-wing rhetoric, exemplified by Trump’s ideological peers such as India’s Narendra Modi, Brazil’s Jair Bolsonaro, Slovenia’s Janez Janša, Turkey’s Recep Erdoğan, Russia’s Vladimir Putin, and – as Blizzard implies – Hungary’s Viktor Orbán. Patriotism intersects with and feeds off this swelling language of nationalism (and fascism) desperate for oxygen (Roy, 2020). I refer to this as *hypernationalism*.

One respondent, Kedi, rebuked me for not doing my “research” and posted news headlines to defend this hypernationalism: “British jobs for British workers”; “2021 Budget: We will put Nigerians first, says Gbajabiamila”; “Zimbabwe tops number of arrested foreign nationals in Joburg”; and a picture of a man holding a “Ghanaians first” placard. These articulations draw on a global

anti-migrant discourse, with anti-black particularities in Africa: Nigeria and Ghana oppose migration from neighbouring African countries, and Kedi focuses on Zimbabwean criminals – despite pervasive criminality in South Africa (SAPS, 2020).

(2) Law and order

Tebogo (self-described as ‘Patriot’) constructs patriotism as protecting legal citizens from illegal migrants and frames the #PutSouthAfricansFirst movement as necessary for restoring law and order in the country.

Tebogo: Label each & everyone of us xenophobic. That title no longer scares us or will make us submit. We will no longer allow privileged individuals to talk down or "manage" us & the realities of millions of SAns who realise our country is under invasion. Illegal immigration is a crime.

Author: What's your plan?

Tebogo: Replace the ANC government with a government that has the necessary political will to enforce South Africa's immigration and labour laws. It's really that simple. There is nothing xenophobic with pointing out that these illegal immigrants are in reality economic migrants. Or?

Tebogo's assertion that “Illegal immigration is a crime” foregrounds a discourse of criminality that affects the “realities of millions of [South Africans]”. He writes that if government lacks “political will”, then citizens must “Replace the ANC government”. “It's really that simple” tries to reduce complexity into a single-issue problem, i.e., a weak government unable to implement its own “immigration and labour laws”. Tebogo's frustration at the ruling political party, the African National Congress (ANC), expresses disappointment that social and political power did not translate into economic power for black South Africans (Statistics SA, 2015). The ANC is now at its weakest point since 1994, with only 57.5% of voter share. Widespread corruption, poor policy implementation, and the “moral rot” of the ANC (Gobodo-Madikizela, 2013) has contributed to this. Ironically, Tebogo's “simple” plan to “replace the ANC” ignores his scapegoating of “illegal immigrants” – an easy target for misplaced “pent up anger and frustration” (Wilson & Magam, 2018, p.103). This frustration is felt in Dimpho's short tweet:

Dimpho: South Africa is not a Banana Republic... LAW & ORDER!!!!

Lefa reframes xenophobia as a will to eradicate lawlessness, due to a lackluster government.

Lefa: For the record, #PutSouthAfricaFirst challenges the rampant lawlessness effected by foreigners and allowed by gvt. Is that not a worthy cause? Are we not suffering enough as Africans as a result of terrible African leadership? What you see in this thread is no fluke. Its real

Lefa expresses a politics of pain and suffering by asking “Is that not a worthy cause? Are we not suffering enough...?” by implying that “rampant lawlessness” is a result of foreign criminality and government ineptitude. He adds to Tebogo’s disillusionment with the ANC. The claim that “terrible African leadership” is responsible for the continued suffering of African citizens draws on Fanonian theory that anti-colonial movements morph into post-colonial agents of oppression, having internalized the anti-black logic used by colonial authorities (Fanon, 1964). Lefa went on to post nine news articles, screenshots, and videos of African migrants allegedly involved in illegal activities, including accusations that illegal migrants use fake Identity Documents (IDs) to get low-wage jobs in restaurants. Migrant criminality is propped up by bias-confirming examples of job-stealing Africans, a common Afrophobic stereotype despite counterevidence (Chaskalson, 2017).

Tebogo’s war metaphor (“our country is under invasion”) intersects with fears of losing jobs *and* the nation-state to migrants. Gqola (2008, in Hassim et al., 2008) draws attention to the aggressively patriarchal nature of xenophobia and its intersections with masculinist violence, as expressed here through military discourse. This discursive maneuver serves two functions: it creates an image of an invading enemy trespassing on our national sovereignty, threatening law and order, and it inversely deploys a discourse of foreign criminality as justification for violence to protect the nation-state from these imagined enemies – if we are “under invasion” then violence is permitted under war conditions. This aspect of hypernationalism is fear-based: aggressively driven by nationalist anxieties of losing control (“lawlessness”) and local anxieties of losing material resources like jobs to “economic migrants”. A discourse of law and order helps citizens like Tebogo, Dimpho, and Lefa to gain agency and power over these problems.

Returning to Tebogo’s initial discursive move (“We will no longer allow privileged individuals to talk down or ‘manage’ us”), he strategically excludes me from the “millions of [South Africans]” affected by foreign criminality and rescripts me as an outgroup of “privileged individuals”. The discursive binary of oppressed insiders and privileged others draw a dividing line of class and location to separate those who are perceived to be affected by foreign criminality and those who are not. In so doing, a discourse of law and order intersects with a discourse of localized marginality.

(3) Localised marginality

Some people expressed a position of unique disadvantage and despair constructed as experientially out of reach for people perceived to be unaffected by migrants.

Wisani: I see that many people misunderstand our movement #PutSouthAfricanFirst but its fine. Let us be steadfast and protect our beloved nation [...] stop trying to villify a movement that speaks for the marginalized South African

Wisani demarcates “*our* movement” and “*our* beloved nation” with socio-economic boundaries. A discourse of patriotism intersects with a discourse of localized marginality. In the latter, citizens are included in the logic of hypernationalism as a precarious, *classed* patriotism insofar as they are “*the marginalized South African*”. Like Tebogo’s assertion in the previous section that “privileged individuals” cannot understand the “realities” of the suffering majority, these discursive tactics construct critics – like me – as lacking the moral and epistemic authority to have an opinion about migrants because I am not “marginalized”.

Ekhaya: Tweeting from a point of privilege tends to obscure reality. South Africans are unemployed and state resources are uncertain stretched because of the influx of foreigners, not all can afford medical aide like your privileged self. Keep hiding in your own jail with highwalls

Bra Bob: [Author name], the height of arrogance is trying to discredit a cause simply because it's objectives don't benefit you personally. Illegal immigration doesn't affect you negatively because you live in a gated community, allow those who are affected space to Address it

MaNdosi: Listen we don't care about what you and your views. We are the ones who live with these people not you ! You live behind high walls and probably hire them so you can exploit them. You probably go to malls and not to cbd so just keep your mouth shut !

Several racial, geographic and class divisions inform these tweets, creating a dividing line between those who experience (a particular) “reality” and those who “obscure reality”. Ekhaya dismisses my tweet as rooted in a “point of privilege” that cannot comprehend marginality. Unemployment and poor access to healthcare is blamed on “the influx of foreigners” that stretches “state resources”, drawing on Tebogo’s earlier depictions of a country “under invasion”. This epistemic tension works to exclude universalizing opinions from privileged outsiders. Constraints are placed on the possibilities of who can access knowledge about the material effects that immigration has on the lives of *marginalized* South Africans. The implication here is that “those who are affected” by migrants – via common physical and social spaces – have a grassroots view, perhaps what Narayan (1988, p.31) called “an epistemic privilege of the oppressed” as insiders to a particular experience that I – as a presumed outsider – do not have epistemic access to.

This discourse is accomplished by respondents using the “gated community” as a symbol of middle-class privilege and epistemic disavowal. Drawing on Michel Foucault’s notion of heterotopia as a disturbing space of otherness, a world within a world, Hook and Vrdoljak (2002, p.199) explore and critique the rise in gated communities in post-1994 South Africa as spatio-discursive dualities in which “already powerful class and race divisions are reinscribed in concrete terms, in barred-off roads, unpassable walls, electrified fences, booms and razor-wire”. MaNdosi’s point that “We are the ones who live with these people not you” asserts a geopolitics of proximity embedded in a

raced and classed social (dis)order. These enduring urban spatial divisions reinscribe apartheid-era housing, land, and transport inequities (influencing choices of going to “malls” versus “cbd”/central town) that are intimately linked to socio-economic transformation and safety. These exist in the nexus of crime, violence, fear, and social exclusion that impact urban development (Landman & Schönteich, 2002). Insofar as poverty limits democratic freedoms, Ekhaya describes securitized residential zones as prisons divorced from “reality”, thereby flipping assumptions about a “privileged self” by constructing economic privilege as an ironic curtailment of freedom (a “jail with highwalls”).

Indeed, I do live in a private, suburban complex with electric fencing and 24-hour security guards. I have secure employment and my own car. Bra Bob’s accusation that “illegal immigration doesn’t affect you negatively” is perhaps true. I cannot think of many situations where I have explicitly and personally been disadvantaged because of migrants. My “sympathies” – critiqued earlier by Lefa – are partly routed through positive experiences with refugees in a community psychology partnership and in my job in [organisation] wherein I encounter psychosocial oppression every day, affecting both locals and migrants. Nevertheless, I am on the epistemic margins of migrant communities and poorer South Africans directly affected by such migration, despite my personal, political, and professional attempts at working across and with such differences (Narayan, 1988).

(4) Pre-colonial indigeneity

My name and photo on Twitter ‘race’ me as person of Indian ancestry within the logic of South African racial classification. Several responses to my tweet were explicitly racist and leveraged a discourse of localized marginality to bolster a cruder wave of anti-Indian racism. This was a paradoxical strategy to defend a cause by turning *against* certain citizens. I opt to use the term *pre-colonial indigeneity*¹⁰ to describe this racist discourse, because it is underwritten by a fantasy that romanticizes a return to an original, pre-colonial country inhabited by its indigenous peoples. Although the comments are crudely racist, to frame them entirely *as* racism would be to miss the socio-historical genesis of this prejudice. Several extracts are needed to fully illustrate this point.

One reply came from General Mike. ‘He’¹¹ described himself as a “radical activist” from Midrand, Gauteng province. His profile pictures included a South African flag in the shape of a heart, and a soldier holding a gun. He responded to my Tweet at 11.30pm, a few hours after my original post.

¹⁰ See Neocosmos (2010) for an alternative analysis of how the imagination of citizenship as indigeneity has its historical roots in the apartheid-era migrant labour system, whose dismantling ironically created the conditions for post-apartheid xenophobia.

¹¹ I am making assumptions based on the pseudonym but could be wrong. Likewise, almost all racist comments directed at me came from Twitter users with names and pictures that imply they were black South Africans, but it is impossible to know for sure, but can be reasonably assumed when the thread of replies is looked at in its entirety.

General Mike: Go to hell. Who do you think you are? You should be concentrating on the Christmas curry left overs. We don't expect to be questioned by Koolies in our land¹².

Coolies – correctly spelt – is a racist slur with a history of being used to dehumanize people of Indian ancestry, including the ±152 000 indentured Indians shipped to South Africa in the 1860s by British colonialists (Hughes, 2007; K Pillay, 2017). It is obviously hurtful to be called a coolie – in as much as it goes without saying that using the K-word against black South Africans or the N-word against African Americans would be unacceptable. General Mike's reference to "Christmas curry leftovers" invokes stereotypes about Indian food, and the use of "We" and "our land" asserts the imagined boundaries of inclusion and exclusion within a hypernationalist logic. The fact that "Coolies" were lured into this country to work the land as agricultural labourers, and that land dispossession is a colonial driver of contemporary poverty and existential angst, underscores the affective significance of the phrase "in our land". Others keenly supported him.

Kholwani: Shut up and go back to India you fucking coolie! [...] These coolies are fucking parasites!

Patriotic: Go home chief... South Africa is very xenophobic and if you're uncomfortable with that you can leave but you won't leave because you're enjoying the fruits of South Africa..We can see you're a double agent when it comes to nationality you swing in two different directions" [...] Fake South African

Nelly Ngwenya: You have dropped your brain after you crossed so many seas to come and reside in South Africa. The spices and banana have replaced your brain now you should go back where you came from. As an origin South African I want my country back from aliens. [#WeWantOurCountryBack](#)

These comments foreground the precarity of nationality. Despite most South African Indians being fourth or fifth generation citizens and making up ±2.6% of the national population (1.5 million people), we suffer contested identities, with national loyalties frequently called into question. "Go back to India", "Go home", "You can leave", "Fake South African", and "Go back where you came from" all resist the inclusion of Indians as bona fide citizens with a local heritage and lineage, foregrounding links to colonial India instead. I am constructed as foreign and my critique of xenophobia is interpreted as self-serving, because I am seen as "a double agent" with dual loyalties and the option of living somewhere else.

These politics of place-identity and belonging are rooted in historical separations, tensions, and resentment between black and Indian South Africans (Hughes, 2007). The divide and conquer logic of coloniality deliberately fueled animosity amongst the oppressed majority, with tensions often erupting between Indian and black citizens in KwaZulu-Natal province. Lefa uses Gandhi as an exemplar of these divisions.

¹² This tweet was reported and subsequently removed by Twitter for violating its guidelines.

Lefa: Now here is a man of Indian descent who should swear by the preachings of Mahatma Ghandi, the same Ghandi who fought for Indian rights exclusively & rejected the African as kaffirs (the unholy); Oh my, how history repeats itself in the most obscure of ways? I am lost for words

Author: Why should I swear by Gandhi?

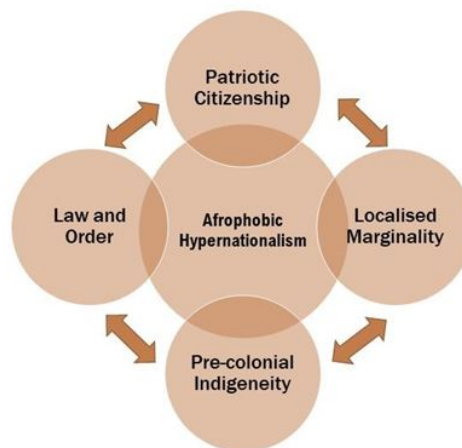
Lefa: Oh, so you don't appreciate the stereotyping you slavishly dish to South Africans who oppose the swamping of their country by illegal immigrants when it is directed at you?

Gandhi, an Indian lawyer and activist, stayed in South Africa between 1893 – 1914 and became a leader for indentured Indians, fighting against racist and colonial laws. However, despite global acclaim, his legacy during British colonialism reveals an ambiguous figure whose anti-black opinions fractured historical relationships between local Indians and local black Africans in then Natal (Desai & Vahed, 2016). Lefa draws upon these conceptions of Gandhi-the-racist in his efforts to homogenize all Indians. Lefa's phrasing that I am stereotyping "*South Africans* who oppose the swamping of *their* country" tries to discursively distance me from citizenship by constructing me as outside the nation-state, a perpetual migrant (K Pillay, 2016).

Historical anger and wounds about unfair access to land, codified in the racist Glen Grey Act of 1894 and the Natives Land Act of 1913, contour contemporary relations between black and Indian South Africans. This discourse, a romanticised desire for pre-colonial life, is therefore linked to the growing impatience around land redistribution, because land ownership is seen as a means of undoing the racialized spatial asymmetries and inequities caused by centuries of property dispossession (United Nations Development Programme, 2014; Neves, 2006). Land is deeply and intimately intertwined with a sense of place, space, and identity, which is further entangled with notions of inclusion/exclusion and insiders/outsideers. A discourse of pre-colonial indigeneity is therefore a primal longing for stolen land, despite its racist articulation.

Towards a discursive model of Afrophobic Hypernationalism

I propose that an emerging meta-discourse of 'Afrophobic Hypernationalism' may help us understand how and why South African citizens express anti-migrant sentiments on social media. These articulations, foremost, be located as manifestations of colonial continuities rooted in a historically divisive anti-black ontology. I summarize the four contributing discourses to this model (see Figure 1).

Figure 1. A discursive model of Afrophobic Hypernationalism

Patriotic citizenship: Here, I demonstrated how people accentuate nationalistic duty and pride to resist or embrace accusations of Afrophobia. Using affective appeals, a binary is constructed between sympathetic patriots and unsympathetic non-citizens. ‘Non-citizens’ may legally be South African, but this discursive strategy is a paradoxical mix of racist exclusion of minorities – like myself – and nationalist inclusion of black citizens, despite the ironic anti-black ontology informing the meta-discourse.

Law and order: Here, I demonstrated how people construct patriotism as protecting legal citizens from illegal immigrants by framing Afrophobia as necessary to eradicate lawlessness and foreign criminality. This aggressive patriarchy intersects with masculinist- and military discourse. A vicious cycle of fear and anger is created: fear of losing control (lawlessness and unemployment) and anger at government’s inability to secure its borders and create jobs.

Localised marginality: Here, I demonstrated how people construct positions of unique disadvantage as experientially out of reach for people perceived to be privileged and unaffected by migrants. Geographic and class boundaries become the dividing line for who has the moral and epistemic authority to have an opinion about migrants and who does not, thereby placing constraints on the possibilities of who can access knowledge about the material effects of migrants.

Pre-colonial indigeneity: Here, I demonstrated how people construct a romanticised desire for pre-colonial life inhabited by indigenous peoples. This is linked to impatience around land redistribution following colonial land dispossession. This includes a paradoxical strategy to defend hypernationalism through racism, by turning against minority citizens who may have access to land, because land ownership is racialized and embedded in spatial asymmetries and inequities.

Each of these discourses intersects with the other as mutually constitutive. Taken together, they form a discursive model that goes beyond straightforward

xenophobia, racism, or ethno-nationalism. It is inherently anti-black and closer in its articulation to colonial-era and apartheid-era discourse. Social media speeds up the dissemination and transmission of this meta-discourse – via hashtags and hyperlinks – faster than ever. As such, I propose we think about this as not only xenophobic but *Afrophobic*, and not only nationalistic but *hypernationalist*.

Concluding remarks

Hassim et al. (2008) wonder whether our rainbow nation metaphor should be replaced by an onion: the outer layer reflecting the most vulnerable strata of society, such as foreign nationals; beneath them other politically peripheral groups; and eventually the innermost, protected core, those deemed ‘worthy’ of psychosocial dominance. In this ethno-nationalist reimagining of what inclusion and belonging looks like in South Africa – as compared to what we hope and mythologize it to be – we are left with an ‘Onion Nation’ that is hardly as romantic or appealing to the project of nation-building, inclusive citizenship, or democratic cosmopolitanism. It is, however, an apt conceptualization of our country. Building on this metaphor, I would add – tragically – that our violent peeling and slicing of this onion leaves many of us in tears. In a context of economic desperation, persistent poverty, and pent-up rage, in the most unequal country in the world, it is perhaps unsurprising that migrants are scapegoated for broken political promises. By hailing an imagined online community with shared anti-migrant sentiments, the proponents of #PutSouthAfricansFirst believe they are advocating a just war to gain a life of dignity and economic emancipation. A truly decolonized nation-state, however, requires us to think far more radically about what it means to live in harmony beyond the binaries of settlers and natives (Mamdani, 2020). As this article has demonstrated, the #PutSouthAfricansFirst movement is embedded in a discursive model of ‘Afrophobic Hypernationalism’ that rearticulates anti-black coloniality and impedes South Africa’s democratic journey towards liberation, freedom, and decoloniality.

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Urban “problem neighborhoods” – problems for whom? Marginalized youths’ lived experiences and the *right to the city*

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Abstract

On a societal-political level, urban so-called “problem neighborhoods” are a designated problem. Hegemonic discourses about these neighborhoods are mainly characterized by deficient, problematizing and racist positions. Various approaches and interventions have been developed on different levels of society to get rid of the problem of “problem neighborhoods.” The most influential and widespread social policy and urban planning response has been to promote the concept of “social mixing” through the influx of non-racialized, *non-migrantified* middle-class residents into “problem neighborhoods” by making the neighborhoods more attractive to these new residents. The attempt of understanding the problem(s) of “problem neighborhoods,” young people’s lived experiences of inequality, and their collective and individual actions/“behavior” should include two perspectives: On the one hand, the complex perspective of “the society” on these neighborhoods, their inhabitants and their actions, the historical development of these marginalized neighborhoods, the political and urban planning decisions that shape people’s lives today and which is an important frame of reference for all the actions, feelings, plans and self-images of their inhabitants. On the other hand, the perspective of the youth themselves. In their *everyday practices*, they have to refer directly or indirectly to all these social interpretations of themselves, of their actions and to the structural conditions derived from these interpretations. German Critical Psychology (Holzkamp, Markard) as a subjective science in the Marxist tradition provides the analytical category of “generalized vs. restrictive capacity for action” to conceive analytically this double possibility in human activity between adaption to existing conditions and resistance in order to dispose of the conditions. The basic assumption is that people do not only live “under” conditions, but are also able to change and relate to them. In the first section, I present the problems *with* “problem neighborhoods” as they historically have evolved, been created, and exist today in major German cities. In the second section, I use excerpts from ethnographic field notes and biographical interviews from the research project *Living Youth in a migration society: Dealing with social inequality* in the city of Berlin to interpret young people’s perspectives on dealing with problems in their neighborhoods. In the final section, I discuss the significance of (the)

problems for the community and the question of a possible realization of the *right to the city* in Lefebvre's sense.

Keywords

social inequality, urban studies, migration society, youth research, biographical research, ethnographic research

Introduction

The town itself is peculiarly built, so that a person may live in it for years, and go in and out daily without coming into contact with a working-people's quarter or even with workers, that is, so long as he confines himself to his business or to pleasure walks. This arises chiefly from the fact, that by unconscious tacit agreement, as well as with outspoken conscious determination, the working people's quarters are sharply separated from the sections of the city reserved for the middle class; or, if this does not succeed, they are concealed with the cloak of charity. (Engels, 1993 [1845], p. 57).

This quote by Friedrich Engels (1993 [1845]) from "The Great Towns" refers to Manchester in the 19th century, but can easily be applied to most European cities at the time and is still valid today. People living in the city's *middle-class neighborhoods* and *villa districts* live their daily lives largely unaffected by the existence of the poorer population living in these segregated former "working-people's quarters." Their children and young people attend different schools, use different recreational facilities and other amenities of public life. Even if there has been a political will for *social mixing* (Bridge et al., 2012; Lees et al., 2012; Rinn & Wiese, 2020) in Germany since the 1990s with regard to the dimensions of inequality of *race*¹ and class – we will come back to this in more detail –, this is rather a *one-way street*. The neighborhoods of the poorer population are supposed to be made attractive for people with a *middle-class background*, but not the villa neighborhoods for the poorer, *racialized* and *migrantified*² (El-Tayeb, 2016; Mecheril, 1997) population. The designated "problem neighborhoods"³ are the neighborhoods of poorer, marginalized residents, not the

¹ I am using the term *race* italicized because it is at times necessary to address *racism* as a *social mediation in societies*. I am aware of all its horrible connotations, but freezing in speechless impotence in the face of this term, sometimes tempts one to mask contexts, relations and experiences and thus (inadvertently) contribute to the silencing of experiences of *racialized* persons (within European societies). See also: Sarbo, B. (2022). Rassismus und gesellschaftliche Produktionsverhältnisse. Ein materialistischer Rassismusbegriff. In E. R. Mendivil & B. Sarbo (Eds.), *Die Diversität der Ausbeutung. Zur Kritik des herrschenden Antirassismus*. Dietz.

² I use the terms "racialized" (*rassifiziert*) and "migrantified" (*migrantifiziert*) for people who experience racism (regardless of whether they were born in Germany or not) to make clear that it is primarily an *invocation and ascription of identity* and "otherness" by society, which is referred to and dealt with in everyday practice in different ways.

³ In what follows, I will use the term urban "problem neighborhoods" in quotation marks. Firstly, to establish a critical link to the hegemonic (racist and classist) discourse on these neighborhoods, and

villa neighborhoods – accordingly, no government-funded *social mixing projects* are implemented there.

However, the existence of these segregated, formerly “working-class neighborhoods” – which today, in the age of neoliberalism, are often referred to as *marginalized* and urban “*problem neighborhoods*” – comes to the attention of society when certain incidents occur involving their residents. The reactions of the bourgeois press and the staged surprise that these neighborhoods and their inhabitants (still) exist confirm Engels’ aptly formulated statement. For a brief moment, these neighborhoods are in the spotlight. For a brief moment, the voices of people who have worked there for years as social workers, community psychologists, youth workers and the voices of residents are made audible and heard – albeit mostly within the framework of the *hegemonic racist and classist discourse*, while voices outside of this discourse remain largely marginalized. Shortly thereafter, these neighborhoods disappear again from the general societal attention and are forgotten – after some measures were taken that supposedly solve “the problem” once and for all.

One of these *brief moments of societal attention* for the existence of these neighborhoods was the “riots” on New Year’s Eve 2022/2023 in Berlin. A burning tour coach in the immediate vicinity of apartment blocks of one of the so-called urban “problem neighborhoods” in Berlin-Neukölln attracted particular media attention. It was reported that people had to be evacuated from their homes and that police officers and firefighters were attacked by youths when they tried to help – a headline in almost all major mainstream media outlets. “41 injured police officers,” “145 people from 18 nations arrested,” “45 suspects were German, followed by 27 suspects of Afghan nationality and 21 Syrians,” and “355 initiated misdemeanor and criminal proceedings” – these were the figures subsequently published by Berlin police and picked up by the media.⁴ The statement that the arrested persons suspected of committing a crime were predominantly *young, male, and non-German* immediately sparked a heated debate about *integration* and alleged “problem neighborhoods.” These original figures were revised downward significantly by the Berlin police two weeks after the New Year’s Eve on Jan. 16, 2023.⁵ But the initially published figures had already triggered a *fierce media debate* that could not be stopped⁶. A broad media discussion revolved around *youth, youth culture, youth violence, urban “problem*

secondly, to illustrate that there are indeed social and collective problems associated with living and growing up in these neighborhoods, although they may differ from those ascribed from the outside.

⁴ For example: <https://www.berliner-zeitung.de/news/silvester-in-berlin-ueber-100-randalierer-wieder-auf-freiem-fuss-li.303354>

<https://www.sueddeutsche.de/politik/silvesterkrawalle-festgenommene-polizei-weniger-1.5728666> (retrieved November 01, 2023)

⁵ The figures originally published referred to all people arrested for various crimes in the city that night, but not necessarily linked to these so called “riots.” The new figures published on Jan. 16, 2023 were as follows: 102 criminal charges related to attacks against “emergency personnel,” 59 of them against police, 43 against firefighters and rescue services. Criminal complaints were leveraged against 39 suspects. 14 persons had German citizenship, another 10 persons had dual citizenship. See: <https://www.zdf.de/nachrichten/panorama/silvester-boeller-angriffe-berlin-polizei-100.html> - retrieved November 01, 2023

⁶ See: <https://www.deutschlandfunkkultur.de/silvester-krawalle-berlin-fakten-polizei-100.html> - retrieved November 01, 2023

neighborhoods," values of togetherness, and failed urban policies. The main topic in all these discussions was the *failed integration* of *migrantified* (young) people into "German society" and the revival of commonly known *racist resentments*. The discussions thus moved *fundamental questions of togetherness* in a *migration society* (*Migrationsgesellschaft*) to the center of the debates (Broden & Mecheril, 2014a)⁷. The Berlin district of *Neukölln* received special social and media attention in this respect.

Neukölln is traditionally referred to as a *working-class district of the Western part of the city*, i.e. as one of the districts in which Berlin's industry was already concentrated before the Second World War. The *greater district of Neukölln* is one of the most densely populated inner-city areas in Germany. Today, the district boasts a population of 330.284 inhabitants, of which 4.9 % have a so-called *migrant background* (*Migrationshintergrund*)⁸ and 28.0 % are *foreign passport holders*⁹. In 2022, the *unemployment rate* was 9.3% (Berlin average 4.9%). The *at-risk-of-poverty rate* is 29.4% (Berlin average 18.6%). The share of the population receiving benefits from the minimum welfare programs (*Mindestsicherungssysteme*) is 22.3% (Berlin average 15.6 %) – with poor, unemployed people increasingly concentrated in certain *new housing estate neighborhoods* (Amt für Statistik, 2022). As early as the 1930s – as a result of the Great Depression of 1929 – *media coverage of unemployment* shaped *Neukölln's* image in Germany and abroad. In the context of Hitler's seizure of power and during World War II, *Neukölln* became known as a *resistant district* in which the National Socialist German Workers' Party (*Nationalsozialistische Deutsche Arbeiterpartei*; NSDAP) was unable to achieve a breakthrough despite its other electoral successes. *Post-Fordist deindustrialization* and increasing *globalization*, moreover, dissolved traditional local and economic structures, and low-income people and welfare recipients increasingly concentrated in *Neukölln* (and other traditional working-class neighborhoods of the city). With the fall of the Berlin Wall (*Mauerfall*) in 1989, formerly peripheral districts – like parts of the greater district of *Neukölln* – suddenly became attractive as *central, inner-city areas* for both *real estate speculators* and a *new young alternative (former) student scene* moving to Berlin from all over Germany and Europe (Heinen, 2014; Soederberg, 2017). Strong *gentrification* processes have been taking place until today (Döring & Ulbricht, 2016; Holm, 2011). *Real estate speculation* and

⁷ The term "migration society" (*Migrationsgesellschaft*) was shaped in Germany in the 1990s and 2000s and increasingly used to describe the fact that *migration* is an integral part of societal reality. Societal debates relating to the fact of a migration society are accompanied by questions of identity and of which social context is and should be the relevant political-symbolic reference unit (See: Broden & Mecheril, 2014a).

⁸ "A person has a *migrant background* if he or she or at least one parent was not born with German citizenship. Specifically, this definition includes immigrant and non-immigrant foreigners, immigrant and non-immigrant naturalized citizens, (late) Aussiedler (ethnic German repatriates) and the descendants of these groups born as Germans. The displaced persons of the Second World War have a separate status (according to the Federal Displaced Persons Act); therefore, they and their descendants do not count as part of the population with a migrant background." (transl.: G. E.) Statistisches Bundesamt, F. S. O. o. G. (2023). *Definition Migrationshintergrund*.

⁹ Population register statistics Berlin June 30, 2023 (Einwohnerregisterstatistik Berlin 30. Juni 2023), data from the Berlin-Brandenburg Statistics Office (Amt für Statistik Berlin-Brandenburg), retrieved October 30, 2023.

rising rents have led to an influx of people with higher income and education, especially into the district's old neighborhoods (*Altbauviertel*) near the city-center. Low-income and unemployed people, the former residents of these neighborhoods, are more and more displaced out of the city into the new housing estates (*Neubausiedlungen*) of the district, which increasingly receive (media) attention as so-called "problem neighborhoods" with designated societal problems.

After New Year's Eve 2022/2023, one of these *designated problems* was *youth violence*. Accordingly several *summits against youth violence* were convened in Berlin to draft *interventions for the prevention of youth violence* and attended by representatives of non-governmental organizations (*Freie Träger*), youth education centers, politicians and other education experts, as well as selected Berlin youth themselves. The result of the second summit was 29 concrete measures in *four pillars*, in which 90 million euros are to be invested in the years 2023-2024: *first*, in parental work and school social work; *second*, in youth social work; *third*, in strong neighborhoods and venues for youth; and *fourth* in clear consequences for criminal offenses and boundary violations (repressive measures against juvenile delinquency such as better networking between police and youth welfare services and new positions in the youth departments of the public prosecutor's office).¹⁰

The political debate in Germany triggered by the *scandalizing coverage in the mainstream press* as well as the measures taken in the form of these youth summits are reminiscent of Nelida Fuccaro's (2016) conclusion to her analysis of violence and cities in the Middle East:

In short, treating violence as contingent on place and the rhythms of urban life can reveal how the physical, material, and immaterial qualities of the city become enmeshed with various forms of state and social power. At a basic level, it problematizes simplistic binary understandings of the relations between state and society, between rulers and ruled, and between citizens and the government. [...] This reading exposes the interface between urban activism and state repression; between street violence and security regimes; between urban norms and institution building; and between civic identity, nationality, and citizenship (Fuccaro, 2016, p. 11).

It is evident that in this renewed debate in Germany and in the reaction to it (which ties in with existing hegemonic discourses), violence has not been treated as a *problem for society as a whole*, not as a *relationship between conflicting parties*, not as part of the ongoing struggle for the *right to the city*, but has been located exclusively among young people from certain places of residence/neighborhoods and ascribed countries of origin or religious affiliations. *Youth violence* thus became a *problem of "the others"* – and *one of the main*

¹⁰ Concrete measures for the prevention of youth violence for the years 2023 – 2024. Second summit against youth violence at the invitation of the Governing Mayor of Berlin on February 22, 2023 (*Konkrete Maßnahmen zur Prävention von Jugendgewalt für die Jahre 2023 - 2024. Zweiter Gipfel gegen Jugendgewalt auf Einladung der Regierenden Bürgermeisterin von Berlin am 22. Februar 2023*) https://www.berlin.de/rbmskzl/_assets/aktuelles/ergebnispapier-zum-2-gipfel-gegen-jugendgewalt-am-22-februar-2023.pdf?ts=1698053766 (Retrieved October 30, 2023).

problems that needs to be solved by societal intervention to prevent such unrest from recurring. Existing societal problems have been *individualized* (partly psychologized and pathologized) and *depoliticized*. *Political* and *social power*, *urban poverty* and the reference to *everyday state repression*, *gentrification* and *displacement* from inner-city areas have been marginally addressed in this heated debate, but have had no influence on interventions against the diagnosed problem of *youth violence*.

To gain a more comprehensive understanding of the current situation in major German cities and of people living in urban "problem neighborhoods," it is necessary to place the *problem constellations* relating to urban "problem neighborhoods" into the context of *society as a whole* – taking into consideration the *overall societal mediatedness* (*Vermitteltheit*) of *individual existence* (Holzkamp, 1985)¹¹: *Which societal conditions, interventions and hegemonic discourses shape the lives of people growing up in urban "problem neighborhoods"?* *What are the lived experiences of the people themselves?* In the next sections, I will therefore first discuss very briefly *the problem(s) with urban "problem neighborhoods"* as they have historically evolved, been created and exist today in major German cities. It quickly becomes clear that approaches such as *social mixing* and *measures against youth violence* only shift the problems by contributing to the *marginalization*, *othering* and *displacement* of the poorer population from inner cities. In this way, these approaches not only fail to address the problems of the people in urban "problem neighborhoods," but actually exacerbate them. Secondly, after a short introduction to the Critical Psychological approach (Holzkamp, 1985; Markard, 2009) and the methodology of the research biographical-ethnographic project *Living Youth in a migration society: Dealing with social inequality*, I will use excerpts from ethnographic field notes and biographical interviews to interpret *young people's lived experiences of dealing with problems in their neighborhoods*. In the last section, I will discuss the significance of certain *collective ways of dealing with problems* of inhabitants in urban "problem neighborhoods" and the question of a possible realization of the *right to the city* in Lefebvre's sense.

The problem(s) with urban "problem neighborhoods"

According to Henri Lefebvre (2006 [1996]), the emergence of today's *urban problematic* is closely linked to *industrialization* as its trigger. Cities, of course, existed before the onset of industrialization – for example, the oriental city associated with the *Asiatic mode of production*, the antique city associated with

¹¹ However, this overall *societal mediatedness* (*Vermitteltheit*) of individual existence (Holzkamp 1985) can never be fully captured – especially not in this spatially limited paper. In the following, I will only (be able to) to place the emergence of today's urban "problem neighborhoods" in a larger world-historical context in very abbreviated form, focusing primarily on Germany, in particular on the Federal Republic of Germany. My reference points are based on the interconnections and contradictions that the *co-researchers* themselves address or that I myself have come across in the course of my *participant observation* in these urban "problem neighborhoods" in the Western part of the city of Berlin – in line with the research style of *Grounded Theory*.

the *ownership of slaves*, and the medieval city embedded in *feudal relations*. But the imposition of the *capitalist mode of production* and the emergence of an *industrial bourgeoisie* led to a significant concentration of power in the cities. David Harvey (Harvey, 1975, 1985) speaks of an *urbanization of capital*.

In Germany, the period after World War II was characterized by large *migration movements*, predominantly to the cities with their large factories and industrial plants (Brinkmann & Sauer, 2016; Krummacher, 2017; Oltmer et al., 2012). At that time, economies in all regions of the world were managed by “*state-centered regulatory regimes*”¹² (Evans & Sewell Jr, 2013, p. 35). Partly because of the shortage of male workers after the Second World War, *recruitment contracts* concluded in the Federal Republic of Germany (FRG) with Italy, Spain, Portugal and Yugoslavia, and later also Greece and Turkey (Rass, 2012) and in the German Democratic Republic (GDR) with its “brother states” Algeria, Angola, China, Cuba, Mongolia, Mozambique, Poland, Hungary and Vietnam. At that time, there was no *communal integration policy* in either the FRG or the GDR – the focus was on *temporary integration into the labor market*, rather than on a comprehensive social integration concept (Bendel & Borkowski, 2016).

Due to increasing *immigration* and the *many buildings* that had been *destroyed* during the Second World War, the preferred housing model between 1950 and 1970 was the *large housing estate* to create functional, modern living spaces for as many people as possible. During this time emerged the very neighborhoods that today are referred to as “social hotspots” or “problem neighborhoods/districts.” The *suburbanization trend* with *large housing estates*, on the one hand, and *owner-occupied homes in the countryside* on the outskirts of the city, on the other, contributed to the new composition of the population in the inner-city areas – mainly the unemployed, the poor, migrant workers and their families (Rinn, 2016, 2018). However, this planned *functional restructuring of the city* failed due to several factors according to Rinn (2016, 2018): First, it came into conflict with the *crisis of the Fordist social formation* – I will discuss this topic in more detail below – which led to falling tax revenues, rising government spending (e.g. on social transfers and subsidizing shrinking industries) and a crisis of the urban budget. Secondly, at the same time it met with *resistance from local residents*. The planning of peripheral large housing estates was closely related to the *speculative decay of inner-city residential areas* that were to be cleared for demolition. There, neighborhood initiatives organized against clear-cut redevelopment and “resettlement.”

As already indicated, an important turning point for the economy, urban policy, labor market policy and “migration policy” was the *energy and economic crisis in the 1970s* – which turned out to be a *general crisis of capitalism* that was not overcome until the early 1980s. Advanced capitalist economies saw the *decline of heavy industries* – such as coal mining, steel and shipbuilding – and at the same time an *exchange rate system* was introduced in which the price of a

¹² In *capitalist countries*, the economy was based on “free markets” and private property, regulated by Keynesian welfare states. In *real-socialist countries*, the economy almost exclusively took place between state institutions. See also: Evans & Sewell Jr, 2013

country's currency was determined by the relative supply and demand of other currencies, *new electronic trading technologies* emerged, and the reinvestment of the enormous wealth created by high oil prices in Middle Eastern¹³ countries opened new opportunities for financial speculation of all kinds, especially in the "City" of London and on Wall Street – to name just a few of the most important aspects of this *global crisis* (Merten, 2017; Wilson, 1987). Together with stagnant industrial production, these speculative activities made the *financial sector* the leading "industry" in the United States and the United Kingdom until the mid-1980s. "Perhaps the most distinctive mark of the deep capitalist crisis of the 1970s was the phenomenon of 'stagflation', a puzzling and troubling combination of persistently high unemployment and persistently high inflation that seemed immune to the remedies on offer from the then dominant Keynesian economics. The conundrum of stagflation threw the economic policies of the major capitalist states into disarray" (Evans & Sewell Jr, 2013, p. 41). As a result of this *crisis of Fordism*, the *improved productivity of machines* and increasing *globalization*, a process of *deindustrialization* began in the Western industrialized countries. The metropolises changed from *places of industrial production* to *centers of administration and services*. New jobs were created in the *service sector*, but most of them required a high level of education. At the same time, simple jobs with low educational requirements disappeared more and more from urban areas (Merten, 2017; Wilson, 1987).

As a consequence, a *recruitment stop* was imposed in West Germany (FRG) in 1973, which meant the temporary end of legal "non-European" labor migration. The so-called *guest worker regime* was replaced by other forms of migration, mainly *family reunification* and *asylum migration* (Oltmer et al., 2012). "*Guest workers*" who left Germany at this time received severance pay. For those who decided to stay, there was, up to a certain point, the possibility to bring their families. The number of foreign workers initially fell as a result of the recruitment stop, but the total number of immigrants continued to rise (Herbert, 2001).

Marcel Berlinghoff (2012) points out that the *oil price crisis* was a welcome opportunity in Western Germany to finally put long-standing plans for restrictive labor migration policies into action – following the politics of other Western European countries like Switzerland, Sweden, England and later also France. The characteristic feature of "*guest worker employment*" was the *temporary length of stay* of the labor migrants; however, as the volume of labor migration increased, so did the length of stay of people who came to Germany as "guest workers." This led to increased family reunification in the second half of the 1960s, which had an impact on the *housing market* and the *conception of schooling* and raised

¹³ High oil prices in the Middle East and the resulting prosperity, particularly in what is now Saudi Arabia, Qatar and the United Arab Emirates, enabled the development of long-term economic stability in the region. Revenues from oil sales were invested not only in health care, education, housing, and social security for their own populations, but also in infrastructure development such as roads, airports, ports, and telecommunication networks, which attracted foreign investors. Many Middle Eastern countries have established sovereign wealth funds to manage and invest their oil-derived assets. These funds invest in various sectors worldwide, including real estate, equities, bonds, and infrastructure projects. In addition, Middle Eastern countries often provide financial assistance and investment to other countries, particularly in the global south.

questions of *legal and political participation*. The contradictions of the *immigration reality*, on the one hand, and the *discourse on temporary labor migration*, on the other, were soon discussed throughout Europe under the collective term “problem of/with foreign workers,” as were economic aspects of migration and integration and control policies¹⁴ (Berlinghoff, 2012, p. 152 ff.). While “alien employment” was still seen as a guarantor of rising prosperity and the containment of inflation in the 1950s and early 1960s, the infrastructural costs of recruitment came increasingly to the fore as the decade progressed (Berlinghoff, 2012, p. 153).¹⁵

In the advanced capitalist world, the late 1960s and 1970s were simultaneously a time of *cultural and political crisis*. This period was marked by great disillusionment with the status quo. The *youth and student movements* of the late 1960s were critical of the prevailing social order and the bureaucratic state, and they experimented with *new political options and lifestyles* – inspired by socialist, communist, egalitarian, bohemian, and libertarian strains, among others. In addition, a new *environmental awareness* raised doubts about unlimited economic growth as a sociopolitical ideal (Evans & Sewell Jr, 2013, p. 42). The struggles for *rights of and justice for* workers, people with disabilities, women, trans, gays and lesbians shaped this period, as did those of *racialized and migrantified* people – the former “guest workers” and their children (Bojadzije, 2012).

The *understanding of citizenship* in the 20th century was characterized by a major contradiction – on the one hand, the *aggressive demand for assimilation of foreigners* without “German blood” and, on the other hand, the conviction that such *assimilation was de facto impossible* for *racialized* persons because the term “German” itself was extremely racialized (El-Tayeb, 2016). Two strongly polarizing and mutually exclusive positions characterized the migration discourse: Germany is a “multicultural society” vs. Germany “is not a country of immigration” (Brodén & Mecheril, 2014b). In the 1990s, the towns of Hoyerswerda, Rostock-Lichtenhagen, Mölln, Solingen and others became the scene of *the most massive racist (arson) attacks and murders* by neo-Nazis and other right-wing extremist groups/individuals in Germany since the end of the Second World War. The *right to asylum*¹⁶ was restricted in 1993 – many of the regulations passed¹⁷ at that time are still valid today (Nuscheler, 2013). However, the amendment of the Citizenship Act in the year 2000 can be seen as *a symbolic step towards the official recognition of migration in Germany as a fact* (Brodén & Mecheril, 2014b, p. 8) and as a paradigm shift in integration policy. The

¹⁴ The following statement by Max Frisch (*1911 † 1991) has become well-known and is still frequently quoted until today to characterize the “guest worker period”: „*Wir riefen Arbeitskräfte, und es kamen Menschen*” (Max Frisch, 1965) – “We called for workers and people came.” – first mentioned in the preface to the book “*Siamo italiani – Die Italiener*” by Alexander J. Seiler, Zurich: EVZ 1965.

¹⁵ As a result, *cost-benefit calculations* were made throughout Europe to find a quota up to which the employment of foreigners would be economically worthwhile – without any satisfactory results for economic representatives and politicians (Berlinghoff, 2012, p. 153).

¹⁶ In 1949 the *right to political asylum* was enshrined in the *Basic Law* of the FRG and in the *constitution* of the GDR.

¹⁷ For example, the so-called “third country regulation” (Art. 16a para. 2 GG) was passed: People who enter Germany via an EU country or a “safe third country” are not legally entitled to asylum.

principle of descent (ius sanguinis), which until then had been the sole principle, was supplemented by the *principle of place of birth* (ius soli), which made it possible to acquire German citizenship. Naika Foroutan and others (El-Tayeb, 2016; Foroutan, 2016, 2021; Siouti et al., 2022; Yildiz, 2017) characterize Germany's society today as a *postmigrant society*¹⁸. Foroutan (2016, 2021) affirms that *postmigrant* stands for an *analytical perspective* that addresses the conflicts, identity formation processes, and social and political transformations that begin after migration and after *recognition as a migration country*. Questions of *national identity*, *belonging* and *representation* are raised anew, including matters of "national-ethno-cultural (multiple) belonging" (*natio-ethno-kultureller (Mehrfach-) Zugehörigkeit*) of citizens (Mecheril, 2003).

The associated *paradigm shift in integration policies* is reflected particularly in the *integration policy of cities* (Häußermann & Kapphan, 2008). To this day, it is not the state, but the city and the *social space* in the district/neighborhood that is considered the decisive level of action for integration policy (Bundesregierung, 2007). Robert Pütz and Mathias Rodatz (2013) analyze this paradigm shift from the perspective of *governmentality analysis* and place it in a context with superordinate processes of a "neoliberalization of the urban" (Pütz & Rodatz, 2013, p. 166). In the words of Peter Evans and William Sewell, Jr.,

Neoliberalism as theory, ideology, and policy has also had diffuse but powerful effects on the global social imaginary. The neoliberal social imaginary extols entrepreneurship, self-reliance, and sturdy individualism; equates untrammelled pursuit of self-interest and consumer satisfaction with human freedom; glorifies personal wealth; sees volunteerism as the appropriate way to solve social problems; and associates government programs with inefficiency, corruption, and incompetence. The neoliberal social imaginary shapes individual goals and behavior while simultaneously making neoliberal political ideology and policy paradigms seem 'natural' (Evans & Sewell Jr, 2013, p. 37/ 38).

All these aspects are reflected in the *integration policies of cities* and their implementation. According to the analysis by Pütz and Rodatz (2013), the transition from a deficit orientation to a *potential orientation* with regard to migration leads to a *diversity-related district policy* in the sense of *diversity mainstreaming*, which includes the organization of administrative action and questions of political control. The need for political intervention is accordingly derived from the *benefits for the city* (Pütz & Rodatz, 2013, p. 170). In contrast to *hierarchical control* (city administration), political control now takes place *horizontally* with *network-like processes* (urban governance). Civil society and private sector actors are increasingly involved. The strategy relies on *self-*

¹⁸ Paul Mecheril (2014) argues that the term *postmigrant* distances itself from the wrong object. As with *postcolonialism* or *postmodernism*, "post"-constructions have an empirical and a political-normative dimension. The use of the word *postcolonialism* articulates, for example, both the empirically justifiable collapse of individual colonial regimes and the legitimacy of colonialism in general, thus also a critique of colonial-imperial practices of superiority. But German society at present is about the political, cultural and epistemic occupation of the social aspects of migration/migration society, not about overcoming migration.

governance through strategic incentives, e.g., project-based funding of NGOs (Freie Träger), which in turn aim at *activating existing resources* and *self-integration* on the ground (Pütz & Rodatz, 2013, p. 174) – anything else is considered uneconomical (Rose 2000, 96f.). *Integration policy* has become one of the *central tasks of municipal politics* with new models of administrative control: integration management systems with monitoring and evaluation tools. Through *potential orientation* – as a central element of this new understanding in integration policy – municipalities become *moderators* of integration policy measures; they shift their responsibility for the participation opportunities for migrants to civil society. As it is highly *spatially oriented*, civil society and private organizations are strengthened, explicitly including migrant organizations and religious migrant communities, which are seen as having great “potential” for the city. Migrants are no longer seen as a “special burden on the welfare state”; rather, a normalization of the state’s response to migration is taking place (Pütz & Rodatz, 2013, p. 173). In the neoliberal logic of *promoting and demanding*, all people are to be activated, not just migrants. *Diversity* is seen as a *resource of governance* towards the dream of a city „that would almost govern itself“ (Rose, 2000, p. 95). The municipalities strategically link their *integration policy* with neighborhood-related measures and programs for the development of “disadvantaged neighborhoods,” e.g., the federal-state program “Neighborhoods with Special Development Needs – Socially Integrative City,” (Soziale Stadt) launched in 1999. *Activation and awareness strategies* are designed to lead residents of marginalized neighborhoods to successful economic, social, and cultural self-management or self-integration (Pütz & Rodatz, 2013, p. 173) – in line with the idea of an *activating welfare state* (Evans & Sewell Jr, 2013; Lanz, 2009). With its *interdepartmental* and *neighborhood-based steering orientation*, the program has three central components: The *structural* upgrading of the housing stock and the residential environment, the *improvement of social, cultural and educational infrastructures*, and the *image of the neighborhood*.

In this way, *urban poverty* is reinterpreted today as a *problem of disintegration*, concentrated mainly in large housing estates on the outskirts of the city, but also in old housing estates near the city center (Rinn, 2018) – rather than one of *intersectional class relations*, or of a *lack of disposal of the means of production*, or as the result of a continuous *class struggle from above*, nor as a result of continuous *exploitation of the global South* by the global North. According to this line of reasoning, poor people in urban areas would find themselves in a *self-reinforcing downward spiral* (Rinn, 2016, 2018): the outflow of the middle class worsens the quality of life of the “disadvantaged population groups” that remain behind, e.g., by increasing the burden on economic, social and educational infrastructures. These neighborhoods thus become an additional *factor of disadvantage* for the (remaining) people living there. *Socialization deficits*, “welfare dependency” and *spatial-social neglect* would multiply, if the immediate neighborhood lacked those residents who – according to the inherent logic of the argument – represent the norms of *education- and wage-work-oriented “Western” bourgeois lifestyles* and who could also campaign for better living conditions and investments in their neighborhood (Rinn, 2016, 2018).

"Disadvantaged" residents who are problematized because of their class situation, ascribed *origin*, *religion* or *culture* are to be socially integrated (Rinn & Wiese, 2020).

In the hegemonic discourse, the coherent response to *poverty as an integration problem* is to promote *social mixing* (Bridge et al., 2012; Rinn & Wiese, 2020) in neighborhoods with poor populations. The concept of *social mix* has become an important urban planning and policy goal in North America and in many Western European countries. Although specific programs have evolved in different countries' policy contexts, which differ in their historical references, promoting *socially mixed neighborhoods and communities* by attracting *middle-income people to low-income neighborhoods* is at the heart of all these programs (Lees et al., 2012). Political-administrative actors work to direct investment and middle-class residents to those neighborhoods where upgrading and re-composition of the residential population is still desired. "As they currently exist, mixed-income housing policies are largely based on the (hegemonic) mantra that low-income people themselves are the problem, and that a benevolent gentry needs to colonize their home space in order to create the conditions necessary to help the poor 'bootstrap' themselves into a better socioeconomic position" (DeFilippis & Fraser, 2010, p. 136). It is assumed that living conditions for the poor improve when people with higher incomes or from the middle class live nearby (which in turn should reduce urban poverty in general). James DeFilippis and Jim Fraser argue that there is a "fundamental confusion about space and society" (DeFilippis & Fraser, 2010, p. 137) in this reasoning. Recognizing that the *spatial concentration of poverty* can exacerbate the experience of poverty is by no means equivalent to assuming that the spatial concentration of poor people *causes* poverty. It is also considered that middle-class or affluent people do not benefit from proximity to the poor because the poor themselves do not (cannot) contribute to improving conditions in the neighborhood. The reasons for the *marginalization of places* are seen in the characteristics of the (poor) people, while the *upgrading of a marginalized place* is associated with overarching political-economic forces of urbanization – the (poor) people already living there then play no role at all in this explanation. Although *segregation* is an *obstacle to social justice*, it does not necessarily follow that integration (per se) is a solution. According to the authors, it is unclear whether the spatial proximity of rich and poor leads the rich to perceive, to interact and try to understand the poor at all.

Those who live in mixed-income environments do not escape the reality that "communities" are raced, classed, and gendered. These identities have a long history of being made important in larger society and play out in the workings of mixed-income neighborhoods. The criteria that are implemented on a daily basis to distinguish those who have legitimate claims to the "right to the city" (to inhabit and create urban space) usually undercut subsidized renters in obvious ways [...] How can we not expect those practices to bleed into the social relations between proximate residents and their unequal sense of the right to be in place? This is because the key issue remains the unequal power relations involved in people's access to the space – people's ability, in short, to claim a right to be in the place (or, more broadly, a right to the city). For mixing to have a role in

making our cities more just, the people being mixed need to be in proximity on their own terms and those terms need some level of equivalence or comparability. (DeFilippis & Fraser, 2010, p. 144)

The ability to represent one's own needs and desires in shaping *community processes* and *negotiating social norms* is also inextricably linked to the question of *available cultural capital* (Bourdieu, 1986). Thus, in conflict and negotiation processes, some people succeed quickly and skillfully in using and activating resources outside the neighborhood for the interests of the neighborhood and for their own – others less so (DeFilippis & Fraser, 2010, p. 145). Residents with greater *social, economic, and cultural capital* (Bourdieu, 1986) appropriate so-called “disadvantaged” neighborhoods by *generalizing their own norms and requirements*, for example, for togetherness in the neighborhood or using public space. “The ideal of social mixing refers to hegemonic middle-class values of individual achievement, capacity and lifestyle and thereby stabilizes existing power relations” (Huning & Schuster, 2015, p. 741). *The right to the city* in Lefebvre's sense is thus a call, a demand, and it includes a right to connect to inner-city infrastructures, networks, scenes (centrality), to political participation in decision-making, to bringing differences together in relation to each other, and to thinking and developing collectively alternative possibilities and utopias:

The right to the city cannot be conceived of as a simple visiting right or as a return to traditional cities. It can only be formulated as a transformed and renewed right to urban life. It does not matter whether the urban fabric encloses the countryside and what survives of peasant life, as long as the ‘urban,’ place of encounter, priority of use value, inscription in space of a time promoted to the rank of a supreme resource among all resources, find its morphological base and its practico-material realization. (Lefebvre, 2006 [1996], p. 158).

Moritz Rinn (2016, 2018) raises the question whether current general changes in urban policy, such as *new housing programs*, instruments such as the *rent brake*, or approaches to *restrict investments in gentrification areas* indicate a *break with urban neoliberalization* or whether they should even be evaluated as *progressive strategies* towards a *city for all*. He (Rinn, 2016, 2018) analyzes the effects of these new *urban policy re-regulations* since the 1970s, using the city of Hamburg as an example (which I regard as easily transferable to other major German cities). He concludes that there are few potentially progressive changes that can be positively described as *social*. The observed *more social* policies are not in opposition to *entrepreneurial-neoliberal policies*; rather, both share central, historically developed normative-strategic foundations that constitute an “urbanism of inequality” (Rinn, 2018, p. 10). This entrepreneurial-integrated urban development policy works primarily with neighborhood-based, *middle-class-oriented normalization strategies* and a population policy of *social mix*. The political-administrative promise of a *city for all* is thus to be realized primarily through strategies of “bourgeoisification” (Rinn, 2018, p. 10) of urban spaces that drive exclusion and displacement and reinforce social inequalities

instead of counteracting them – even if there is no direct economic displacement pressure in these neighborhoods.

The complex perspective of “society” on these neighborhoods, their inhabitants and their “behavior”/actions, which can only be outlined here as an overview, is an important *frame of reference* for all *actions, feelings, plans* and *self-images* of the young people growing up in those “problem neighborhoods.” In their everyday practices, they have to refer *directly* or *indirectly* to the social interpretations of themselves and their actions, and to the *structural conditions* derived from them. In the following, I will focus on the *lived experiences* of young people living in urban “problem neighborhoods” in the former Western part of Berlin – after giving a brief overview of the Critical Psychological approach (Holzkamp, 1985; Markard, 2009) and the methodology of the research project *Living Youth in a migration society*. Using excerpts from recorded conversations and biographical interviews with (young) residents, I will select a few problems as examples that arise from certain narrated incidents in the neighborhood and reflect on *how people deal with these problems*. In conclusion, I will discuss these findings in the framework of realizing the *right to the city*.

***Living Youth in a migration society* – research project and methodology**

All field note and transcript excerpts interpreted and analyzed in this paper are part of the research project *Living Youth in a migration society: Dealing with social inequality*, a *biographical-ethnographic* research project in the tradition of the *Berlin School of Critical Psychology* (Holzkamp, 1985; Markard, 2009). The claim of Critical Science and thus also of the Marxist subject-scientific approach of Critical Psychology (Holzkamp, 1985; Markard, 2009) is generally that it contributes to *(self-) enlightenment* and thus also to the critique of ideological shapes of thinking in the inhuman system of capitalism. That means we are talking about a unity of *epistemic interest* and *change*. The basic assumption is that individual human existence is mediated by society as a whole: In general, individuals do not only live *under* conditions, but actively produce them and can act on them to change them (in cooperation with others). The concrete individual finds her*self of course not in relation to *society as a whole*, but only to those parts of social reality that are relevant for her* life. Not all these societal fields have to be consciously accessible any time – on the contrary, processes of *becoming aware of one’s own mediatedness* (*Vermitteltheit*) in society take place especially when societal *crises* (financial, environmental, pandemics, wars) occur, which set in motion processes of change and subversion on various levels that (also) concretely affect one’s own life. It follows that individual behavior cannot be derived from the social conditions captured by social theory, but that these *social theoretical analyses* are indispensable because individual behavior can only be understood by taking into account the *social conditions affecting the individual’s life*. Both the *objective determinacy* (by conditions) and *subjective determining* of human existence must be taken into account. Accordingly, both are necessary in order to understand people’s actions, *social theoretical analyses*

of societal conditions – as I have (briefly) undertaken in the first part of this paper – and *subject scientific empirical research* in order to gain an understanding of how these conditions can be interpreted and acted upon – as will be illustrated in the following.

Klaus Holzkamp (1985) establishes *two levels of mediation* between the individual and the society: “position” and “life situation” (*Lebenslage*). While *position* refers to the individual's contribution to social production/reproduction in the overall organization based on the division of labor and the associated possibilities and limits of influencing her* life circumstances, *life situation* is conceived in a much more comprehensive way. It includes the social *position*, but goes substantially beyond it. Holzkamp refers here to *actual real living conditions* of an individual; exemplarily, he mentions love relationships, leisure time, engagement in political parties and associations. However, assuming that the global capitalist mode of production is based on *gendered* and *racialized* relations and that *racist* and *patriarchal ideology* are an integral part of the *global capitalist system*, it is not sufficient to locate *position* only within the framework of an economic relationship of exploitation, as Holzkamp suggests. It is necessary to expand the horizon of *position* to include an *intersectional perspective* (see also: Riegel, 2016). It must be possible to mark and name the *social positions* from which certain experiences can be made and others cannot – at least in relation to *class*, *race*, *gender* and *dis/ability*. As a *subjective science* in the *Marxist tradition*, *Critical Psychology* (Holzkamp, 1985; Markard, 2009) provides the *analytical category* of *generalized vs. restrictive agency* to conceive analytically this *double possibility in human agency* between *adaption to existing conditions* and *resistance* in order to dispose of the conditions. Picking up on this concept, Athanasios Marvakis (1996) speaks of “subjective orientations” for acting/ behavior, feeling, thinking, which can either be rather “conventional” and not question the given, dominant meanings, or “transcendent,” if attempts can be reconstructed in the *subjective orientation* to exceed the hegemonic social orientation meanings (Marvakis, 1996, p. 56).

Methodologically the research project relies on *empirical-reconstructive research methodology* (Strübing & Schnettler, 2004), particularly *ethnography* (Breidenstein et al., 2015) and *biographical research* (Dausien, 2015; Dausien & Kelle, 2009). For the methodological implementation, a method of *triangulation* of *ethnographic field research methods* (LeCompte & Schensul, 2013; Spradley, 2016), *expert interviews* and *biographical-narrative interviews* (Rosenthal, 1995; Rosenthal & Loch, 2002) was used, as well as elements of *autoethnography* (Roth, 2005). The *research style* as well as the analysis of data is based on *Grounded Theory methodology* (Glaser & Strauss, 2017; Strauss & Corbin, 1990) and its advancement into a *Constructing Grounded Theory* (Charmaz, 2014) – complemented by *sequential analysis* (Rosenthal, 1995). The excerpts¹⁹ from *interview transcripts* and *field notes* analyzed in the following sections were obtained from field research in an urban “problem neighborhood” in the city of Berlin.

¹⁹ All excerpts have been translated into English and anonymized.

Dealing with problems in urban "problem neighborhoods"

"But what really unites people here is the process of gentrification. That's mainly what all the people are affected by or have been affected by, and that's why they came here. They've all moved here from different regions of the city because rents have gone up and so on. A lot of them moved here because they can afford to live here, and that's why the rents here have gone up to some extent."

"Here, too, already?"

"Now it's starting here too. Here, for example, you can't get an apartment anymore if you have a Turkish-Arab name and not even if you have a lot of children. There are already big apartments here, but they'd rather rent them to seven to eight students than to a family."

"Really? Here are student shared apartments, too?"

"Yes, yes, by now there are. Everything is changing here. And that's increasing here now, too."

In this transcribed excerpt from an interview conducted during field research in a "problem neighborhood," Anas, a resident, summarizes what currently sets his neighborhood apart and what is the common point of reference for all people actually living in this neighborhood. Most of the current residents had already been displaced from other inner-city neighborhoods, because they could no longer afford the rents. But this *process of displacement* is not yet complete; it is slowly taking hold of this neighborhood as well. If we understand displacement with Rinn and Wiese (2020, p. 24) as a *selective change in the appropriation and use of urban resources* such as *housing, neighborhood infrastructures, or public spaces, social mixing strategies* contribute to the *exclusion of marginalized residents*. This mixture-oriented urban policy, which Anas refers to, actively works on a "loss of place" (Davidson, 2008, p. 2402) and thus on *displacement* for especially *racially problematized residents* (Rinn & Wiese, 2020). Anas is aware that this process has already begun in his neighborhood and that it will bring major changes – which will not make his life or the lives of others who live here any easier. The selection of new tenants is now based on *racial characteristics* – this is the first noticeable step. The move of a *student shared housing community* into one of the large apartments that used to be available to families with many children is just the beginning.

What does this societal framework mean for the everyday practices and lived experiences of young people growing up in their neighborhoods? Taking the examples of *three problem constellations* – the *problem of noisy neighbors*, the *problem of challenging existing social rules* and the *problem of protecting the community from external threats* – I will analyze which values and norms of togetherness in the neighborhood are negotiated in these problem constellations. *Who has which problem and what significance do the problems have?*

The “problem of noisy neighbors”: *Touching values of togetherness*

Leila and I are sitting in the family’s living room. In front of us on the table is a huge bowl of sweets, chips, nuts. We drink tea and eat ice cream. She begins to talk about life in the neighborhood and that there are often police operations, but “that the beauty of living in the neighborhood is that you always hear sounds and noises. It’s never quiet, you always hear people, all the time: children, adults, music.”

I notice that there is a Hollywood swing on the balcony, which is actually too big for the balcony. It fills it completely and is turned inward. When you sit on it, you look into the living room. From the outside you can’t see if someone is sitting on the swing or not. She bought this Hollywood swing for herself, with her own money. She loves sitting on it, studying for her university degree, and listening to the people (sounds) in the neighborhood, she tells me.

For Leila, one of the most important aspects of the *beauty of the neighborhood* is always hearing people. She even has her Hollywood swing set up so that she can *hear*, but not see, what’s going on outside. She herself *cannot be seen from the outside* when she is sitting on the swing studying for her university degree. In this way, she is connected to the neighborhood when she is engaged in an isolated activity such as studying, but without being actively involved.

A staff member of the federal-state program “Socially Integrative City,” (Soziale Stadt), however, frames the “problem of noisy neighbors” quite differently:

And the neighbors complain, who want their peace and quiet because they might be going to work. Our Muslim families are also used to living outside until 11 pm. But when you go to work, you want to have your peace at 9:30 pm at the latest. So there are also arguments among Muslim families because one child is screaming downstairs and the other child is sleeping upstairs. That leads to neighborhood conflicts.

She speaks of *disturbance of the peace and quiet* as the cause of “neighborhood conflict,” which conveys the ideal of a *quiet, conflict-free neighborhood* that is not (yet) being achieved. Three aspects are worth highlighting in the community worker’s statement, which show how the *entrepreneurial-integrated urban development policy* outlined above with *neighborhood-based, middle-class-oriented normalization strategies* and a population policy of *social mix* (Rinn, 2018, p. 10) is reflected in her interpretation of the problem of “noisy neighbors”: *First*, the reference to religion in “our Muslim families” stands out. Although “our” suggests a community to which the community worker counts herself (i.e. not a “parallel society of Muslims”), she nevertheless feels the need to mark “the Muslims” in particular and to portray them as a *closed homogeneous group* with specific needs and cultural practices that is opposed to another group, the *less problematic norm-conforming “non-Muslims.”* She places *these values* of “our Muslim families” *in the context of religious practices* of Islam, without further specifying the role of religion in the context of “disturbing the night’s quiet.” *Second*, she speaks in a *paternalistic way* about the neighborhood in which she

herself does not live, but for which she feels responsible such that she believes she knows the people who live there as "her" people – not personally, but as a *homogeneous group with shared (problematic) values*. She speaks from a position above things in which she herself is not personally involved. She feels obliged to keep order, educate the residents and lead them to a better life – she knows what is good and right for the residents. *Third*, the relationship between *wage work* and the need for quiet after 9:30 pm is striking. Of course, this is very reminiscent of house rules – in Germany, it is customary to sign house rules as part of the rental agreement. The night's rest stipulated in the house rules usually starts at 10 pm – after that, noisy activities are to be refrained from. The "Muslim families" probably regularly exceed this regulation by one hour – this is how it has been reported in the form of complaints to her. A connection is made between *working for wages, having to get up early* – and correspondingly *wanting to rest early* – and *not being Muslim*. Quite apart from the fact that this statement seems somewhat outdated in relation to wage labor in the age of neoliberalism, with lived practices of *shift work, home office*, and increasing *workplace flexibility*, it sets the *working, non-Muslim middle class*, with its ascribed needs for peace and quiet, as *the norm for neighborhood togetherness*. In support of her thesis of the existing problem of noisy neighbors, she cites Muslim neighbors who also feel disturbed by the failure to observe the night's quiet – but not because of wage labor, but because of their children's sleep.

Further insight into residents' lived experiences of "neighborhood conflict," noise, and disruption is provided in the following section from the interview with Leila:

I: Here in the house you know everyone?

L: No, you actually say hello and know each other. People also talk from one balcony to the other. Here is quite a different mentality. I don't want to be racist, but it's different than with Germans. It's simply the case that people greet each other here and ask "how you're doing?" out of politeness, even if you're not interested. Then you just listen for five minutes and you move on. And that's how you get to know each other – or because of the kids, who are annoying because they scream through the halls and then you have to talk to the parents. I don't know, we have a neighbor downstairs, for example, whose child knocked over our clothes rack. I don't know, the kids explained that it was an accident. But I was really angry at the child at first, and then I told my mother, and my mother told their mother. But (she laughs) then I said to my mom, because the boy is actually really nice, he was really polite, and he also apologized. "Why are you tattling on him?" I don't know, we know each other through stories like that. Then I said to the mother: "No, he wasn't that bad, he tripped over the clothes rack". Or neighbors smoke shisha on the doorstep. And that's how you get to know each other a little bit. And then we also sit down on the doorstep, like in Lebanon actually, but still a bit more distanced. Not in a way that you visit each other all the time.

Leila speaks here as an expert for her neighborhood, for *neighborly togetherness*, not only for her own perspective on neighborhood relations. This phrasing "I don't want to be racist, but..." is a common opening into racist statements – from

the part of the *non-migrantified, non-racialized people* towards the *racialized* ones. She herself – contrary to the common practice of this introduction – does not devalue “the Germans,” but uses “the German mentality” to abstract from it the *mentality in her neighborhood*. She assumes that the German mentality, unlike the mentality in her neighborhood, does not require explanation – she is talking to a non-migrantified, non-racialized interlocutor. There is a *common horizon of experience* of the people in the neighborhood to which she refers, a certain bond. It’s about *belonging* and *identity* and about differentiation from “the Germans,” who do things quite differently. A “mentality” is lived that differs from the “German” one, but also from the “Lebanese” one. It is a *hybrid mentality, a hybrid space*, in which influences in the sense of *closeness and distance in neighborly relations*, from *both reference mentalities*, are combined in a new kind of *specific local community mentality*. Not as close as in Lebanon and not as distanced as German neighbor relations.

This very specific *neighbor relationship* described here, is about being *polite*, not sharing your whole life with the neighbors. It’s about *appropriateness* and *negotiating closeness and distance*. Five minutes of listening is *appropriate* to be considered *polite*. In this example of a concrete conflict about the clothes rack between neighbors, the *violation of politeness* as an *order of interaction* is resolved with *politeness* – with a polite apology and forgiveness. It is about *loyalty* and *trust*. A high value is to be able to trust each other, to be loyal and not to snitch. Moreover, this small example shows that the conflict is dealt with *collectively* and not individually. There are *parallel communication channels* – between the mothers, between her and the kids – with different meeting points and complex overlays. Relationships are established through these kinds of conflicts between neighbors. They are occasions to get to know each other – at a specific distance.

The problem of challenging existing social rules: *The negotiation of norms of togetherness*

Leila recounts the following incident she observed from her apartment:

I was here once and was eating (*in her family’s second floor apartment with windows and balcony overlooking the small neighborhood shopping center*) when we heard noises from outside. It was young people and these young people met two other people. And then a lot of them joined in and they were talking and then they were arguing. And then they were really arguing. And started hitting each other and stuff. And my German neighbor who recently moved in was really funny, started yelling out the window “No, I saw that” and so on, and “I’m going to report that” and the woman downstairs was also given a slap and then she screamed “Can someone help me? Can someone help me?” – “Yeah yeah, I’ll help you. I’m going to report this.” And then I went to her and said to her, “If you want to live here for a long time, close your mouth before the young people here break also into your apartment. Because they’ve all seen you.” Because she is so crazy, screams out of the window and when she so obviously says that she will

help her, I thought to myself that she is putting herself in danger. Then she thanked me a thousand times "Thank you, thank you".

I: But what kind of people are they? Younger people?

L: I don't know. A couple. They are together, maybe married, a man and a woman and two cats, and I had to laugh, I thought it was funny that she dares to say, "Yes, I will report it" in front of them.

[...]

I: I'm still a bit hung up on this story with the woman.

L: It's not about the fact that she's a woman, it's more about the fact that she's just sticking up for the enemy of the one, that she wants to support the woman downstairs and thus makes enemies. Because the police are simply not welcome. Anything that has to do with accusations, they prefer to sort out among themselves. And when the police came, their parents also came and settled the matter with these people who were here. Then they probably settled the matter among themselves and the charges were withdrawn.

In this narrated incident, too, everything starts with *noises* coming from outside, from other residents of the neighborhood – which, in contrast to the community worker's perception of the neighborhood conflict, are not problematized per se, but are the *reason for wanting to understand what is going on* – and possibly intervene, feel responsible. These noises are the starting point for *opening different channels of communication and interaction* and for *collective solutions*, which in this example leads to a new concrete interaction between newly arrived non-racialized German neighbors. Leila gets to know these new neighbors a little better through this incident with other neighbors on the street outside her window. In the narrated incident itself, there is the *mode of watching* and the *mode of hitting*. Violence needs legitimacy. There is something that happens *rightfully*, and if one does not know who is *in the right*, it is better not to interfere. To interfere means to *hit* or to *be hit*, to put oneself in *danger*. The neighbor follows her *German-bourgeois understanding of order* in accordance with her socialization, and interprets the situation she observes as one that requires her *moral courage*. She does not know that the *conflict parties* know each other, that in her new neighborhood everyone knows everyone (from a distance), that there are *strict rules of social interaction*, ways of *resolving conflicts*, and that many people who are not visible at first glance are ultimately involved in this conflict, can intervene at any time and are standing by in the background. She doesn't know that it is a *collective way of conflict resolution* that is lived here, where values like *loyalty, trust, no snitching to the police* are lived. Things are resolved independently, in a way that is legitimized by the community. In this way, the parents of the young people are involved and the police are relieved of their "duty." The statement "the police are simply not welcome" is a *collectively shared tacit comprehension*, which can be interpreted as an indication of a *collective horizon of experience* with police interventions to the detriment of the residents of the neighborhood.

Rida's biographical narrative also picks up on these *strict social rules of togetherness* in his neighborhood – from a different context:

I never sold to older people because the older people here buy from the core folks, because it's also like, if someone sells here, you can't just go to the same place and sell there. You see? Otherwise there will be a fight. So, for nothing, and in the end, they'll also say, "You're not in the right because he was there before you.", you know? Nobody will stand on your back, that's why. But there are places, for example the Moon Shadow Path, where there are also many people who sell, but there is no one who is dangerous, you know? There are people here who are dangerous. So, what does "dangerous" mean? You are not afraid of them, but it is better not to get into trouble with them, you know?

Similar to Leila, Rida speaks as an expert who knows his neighborhood well, the places, spaces, social rules and keeps an eye on them – in terms of selling drugs. He shares his inside knowledge: There are rules set by the people *who first appropriated the space* about who is allowed to sell drugs in this place and who not. He himself is not one of those who have taken a fixed place, he tries to find his niche without getting into trouble with others. There is the *right of the first* and *of the elder*. The one who comes first sets the rules and permits others to sell drugs in this certain space. The first one is always *in the right* and is supported by all others in enforcing his right. Those who come later or are younger have to be subordinate. There are "dangerous" people who have appropriated spaces and "non-dangerous" ones, which means that they either grant others, new and younger people, the right to sell drugs in "their" spaces, or that they do not immediately and violently enforce their right when others sell there; they tolerate others. It is a *tense* situation when new people try to sell drugs in the same places. It can be very dangerous for the person to try to disregard the rights of the first and eldest.

The problem of threats to the community

L: Yes, that is also something positive about this area. It's like the kids can usually play outside. But for example, there were two boys riding their bikes and then somehow two men tried to take both boys away. That was recently. That was so blatant, I was there in my exam period, studying. And they really tried to take the boys by force. And they managed to take one and not the other.

I: To pull him into a car or how?

L: Just to take him with them. I don't know. I didn't see that. Because there was a lot of hullabaloo. I've never seen the neighborhood like that. That was so blatant, how everybody got up and ran around. It was really so intense. It was like there was a war going on. But the people, I saw them stick together when it came to something like that. And then they called the police. A man had kind of beaten up the boy. Somehow, that's what happened. Supposedly the man said that the kids had been ringing his doorbell, playing pranks, and that's why he wanted to slap him or beat him somehow, he and his wife. But then they caught them and confronted them. Then they took the boy to the hospital.

I: But you were here?

L: I was here at home and then my mother came. No, she called me, that's how it was, and then she came. And I was just studying for an exam. Because I had no

time left and I was completely cut off from everybody and I had to study all the time, I wasn't out at all. And then I noticed it and I thought, "Oh my God, what's going on?" and then I looked out the window and all these people were walking around. I didn't notice it at first because the windows were closed. Then I heard people yelling and saying, "The son of such and such," I don't know. That's when I asked what happened. "A boy was kidnapped"

I: Did you ask out the window?

L: Yes, right. Then I went down for a minute. Then they told me the same thing. There were people everywhere, and it was really strange. Because all the people gathered here, where the boy was kidnapped. They were all there right away. You have to imagine that. I was like, "Oh my God, what is this?" Everybody was asking, looking, I don't know. This is an area where you can rely on others. For example, if you walked by here and somebody was hitting you, they wouldn't just watch. But if you were an enemy, they wouldn't just watch either, you know? Then they would all hit you, too.

In this incident, again the different *channels of communication and interaction* between neighbors immediately become evident – the people on the street, the mother, she herself is asking people in the street. There are *rumors*, everyone knows approximately what happened, but no details, few have observed what happened, but *everyone is involved*. This concerns everyone, everyone is leaving everything and helps where and how they can. A child is being snatched from the community, and that is not a legitimate act. Order is disturbed, a "war" breaks out. It is an attack on the *entirety of the community*, on the *safety* of all children and all families in the neighborhood. The problem is a *collective* and *supra-individual* one. Many people, beyond the core family, are involved, many feel affected. A *common space* is created by *affects*, which does not stop at closed windows and apartment doors. The police are called and come because the usual framework of sorting things out themselves and within the neighborhood is exceeded. Anyone who helps is now welcome – but the police are not more important than anyone else. They are one of many actors trying to find the boy and restore order.

Rida reports another threat to his neighborhood, the presence of junkies and alcoholics:

I told you earlier that there's no heroin here, there's no cocaine here, because they chase these people away. They don't want that. It's also official because these people want the pot business to burst here. And when they sell heroin here, there are heroin junkies walking around. You have to imagine that there used to be heroin junkies everywhere, but now when you look at the main square and so on, you don't see so many alcoholics and heroin junkies hanging around. They chased them all away. You're starting to see heroin junkies here on the forest path, you know? And they chase the dealers away, too. The pushers know, "It's too hot here, we have to go somewhere else," and the junkies are where the dealers are. The pusher is not where the junkies are. With pot it's something else, here you have your place. Everybody knows that this is your place, nobody comes in there. People know they can only buy weed from you. Everything is chill. Everything is serious. You know what I mean? But if there's some junkies walking around and you meet junkies, you know somebody's selling heroin here.

(...)

In this flower meadow park, Afghans used to go at night and sell heroin, and after a week they noticed, and then there was a big brawl. Everybody had stabbing injuries. And now you don't see them anymore. That's just the way it is.

In the neighborhood there are *strict rules*, not only who is allowed to sell in which place, but also which drugs are allowed to be sold in general. Space is appropriated according to *strategic interests*. There are people who *chase away* and there are people who *control*. The spaces overlap, where different interests are negotiated. There is a rule that says junkies and alcoholics are not wanted in the neighborhood, and as junkies are following the heroin pusher, selling heroin is not allowed in the neighborhood. Only the sale of marijuana is allowed for certain people in certain places. The neighborhood should remain free of junkies and alcoholics, and children should be able to play outside safely and unmolested. There is the *serious* drug trade in a fixed place, which everyone knows, and the *unserious* drug trade, which is associated with neglect, with junkies and alcoholics. The *neighborhood as a collective* uncompromisingly distances itself from the latter. Nevertheless, if there are attempts from outside, from other groups and contexts, to undermine this rule, for example at night in the park, the presence of the junkies betrays the presence of the dealers. The dealers are expelled with the use of physical force with knives - and remain with stabbing injuries.

Conclusion

The *first part* of this paper provided a brief overview of the problem(s) with urban "problem neighborhoods" as they have evolved and been created *historically* and how they exist in major German cities today, in order to show the main *societal conditions*, *interventions* and hegemonic *discourses* that shape the lives of people who grow up in so-called urban "problem neighborhoods." In their *everyday practice*, they have to refer directly or indirectly to *social interpretations* of themselves and their actions as well as to the structural conditions derived from them. Hegemonic *urban planning approaches* that are currently being practiced in major German cities, such as *social mixing*, only shift the problems by contributing to the *marginalization*, *othering* and *displacement* of the poorer population from inner cities.

In the *second part*, the focus was on the *lived experiences* of the people themselves. The transcript excerpts of interviews and field notes interpreted were collected during field research as part of the research project "*Living Youth in a migration society*" in an urban "problem neighborhood" in the city of Berlin, Germany.

In summary, this neighborhood is still at the very beginning of *social mixing*. There are strict *social rules of togetherness* in the neighborhood, that protect people and keep dangers away (e.g. junkies, alcoholics, and child abductors). However, the rules differ from the rules of togetherness of people

from the *non-racialized middle class*. The newly arrived middle class residents (students, a couple) are in the minority and are introduced to the rules of the community by the long-term inhabitants, also to grant protection and freedom from danger for them. The *middle-class values* of quiet, compliance with house rules, appropriate use of public space have so far been represented by the community workers, not (yet) by the newly arrived middle-class residents themselves. What is opposed here are two *sets of rules* that operate according to different modes. On the one hand, there are *house rules*, general ideas of an *ideal quiet and conflict-free neighborhood*, rules designed to prevent people from having to negotiate their own needs, so that problems, disputes or conflicts do not arise in the first place. It's about rules that protect *individual peace and privacy*. On the other hand, there is the *lived practice of dispute and reconciliation*, of boundary violations, defense, (physical) violence and demands for being committed to values of *loyalty, politeness and trust* in neighborly relations and in the community. Through problems, conflicts and disputes, people get to know each other; *neighborly togetherness* is lively, noisy and "beautiful," and offers the feeling of being connected and the feeling of *individual security* through seeing and hearing others. It's about rules that ensure *the security and peace of the community*.

What is the purpose of the problems in this urban "problem neighborhood"? There is a *common subject/theme*, which keeps people busy, problems are productive, they are solved collectively. Patterns are interrupted. It is not only about the solution, but also about new acquaintances that are made, *values* that are renegotiated and tested for their validity, through *collective problem solving* with *different channels of communication and interaction*. New members of the community are introduced to the community through the *collective problem-solving process* and thus learn the values and social rules.

Can this lived community of collectivity and support be understood as an attempt to realize *the right to the city* in Lefebvre's sense? On the one hand, without a doubt, urban space is appropriated and used according to the community's own rules. A strategy to use, shape and *inhabit* the neighborhood is realized. Central to Lefebvre's theory (Lefebvre, 2016) is the distinction between *habiter*, which means -in the sense of *vita activa*- the way of living and *habitat*, the residential area, the urban housing program. Urban life involves both. It provides living space (*habitat*) and enables the inhabitants to inhabit it (*habiter*). In this tension, according to Lefebvre, lies the potential for *urban revolution*. As described in the first sections of this paper, the neighborhood is a *large housing estate* that should oppose urban order – along with single-family homes. Lefebvre argued that the *capitalist city* houses its inhabitants in sterile, meaningless spaces, to monitor them, order their lives, and constantly reinforce their roles as *workers* and *consumers*. The findings of this research in a concrete urban "problem neighborhood" counteract this. Even if large housing estates are designed to realize *habitat* instead of *habiter*, people succeeded to realize *habiter*, *vita activa*, a community life, which means *security for the community*, for each individual, for children and families. In the words of Marvakis (1996), "transcended orientations" can be identified because attempts can be

reconstructed in subjective orientations that *transcend* hegemonic *social orientation meanings*.

On the other hand, a mode of use seems to be emerging that does not mean freedom for all, but is based on a *strongly collectively defended and enforced consensus* – if necessary with strong physical and verbal violence. Challenging and breaking these social rules means *danger* for the person or the group. It is the *right of the first* and the *eldest* which is realized. Some of these people who hold these positions of power are “dangerous,” others less so. But in any case, there are *hierarchical structures*. There are people who provide protection, who defend, who chase others, who are empowered to enforce the norm. It is a *hierarchical form of space use*, where a few allow the others to use the space. *Togetherness in the neighborhood* is permeated by structures and power relations that require a certain amount of insider knowledge in order to find one’s way around, but which also offer *protection* from external threats. Problems are solved within the neighborhood according to *its own rules*, which serves not only to *strengthen togetherness*, but also to *reproduce existing power relations in the neighborhood*. Above all, this *collectivity* is strongly *patriarchal*. The *pressure from the neighborhood* preserves *existing gender relations*²⁰, which is an important topic for feminists in Turkey for example (Somersan, 2011). Already these short transcript excerpts show differences in the *appropriation of spaces* by “men” and “women.” The spaces outside the blocks of apartments tend to have a *male connotation*, while the spaces inside the apartments are mostly *feminine*. Also, the *symbolic spaces of courtesy*, of *everyday social interaction* between neighbors, tend to have a more *female connotation*.

If we return to the “riots” on New Year’s Eve described in the introduction, it becomes clear that there is a lot of *frustration, anger* and *dissatisfaction*. *Racism*, poor chances in the (legal) *labor market*, *gentrification*, *discrimination* from growing up in these urban “problem neighborhoods,” social stigmatization – to name only some – are the sources. The strong *social isolation* of young people growing up in these neighborhoods during the *Coronavirus pandemic* in recent years is also relevant in this context. Most families did not have sufficient financial and spatial resources to provide (all) their children with several separate, quiet and undisturbed, technically equipped *homeschooling workspaces*, which resulted in many students dropping out of school and further education. This has exacerbated the already high level of social exclusion. There are societal problems that affect the life of the people growing up in these “problem neighborhoods” that cannot be solved within their own community.

It becomes clear that the problem is not *poverty* per se, but the *social isolation* (Merten, 2017; Wilson, 1987) that accompanies it. It is this *social isolation as a collective* into which people are pushed and into which they have to go, far away from the villa districts and the purely bourgeois old town. Every family, every individual has to find a way to cope in the world inside and outside

²⁰ The negotiation of *gender relations*, the *doing gender* in neighborhood relationships in so-called urban “problem neighborhoods,” can only be briefly touched on here, because it was not the focus of this paper. It is certainly worth an *in-depth analysis* with further excerpts from the research data material – in the framework of an additional stand-alone paper or a comparable publication.

the neighborhood. *Education* is not seen by many as a realistic possibility for social advancement, which would be a way to stay connected to "the outside world." Leila is certainly an exception here. Drawing welfare or selling drugs thus become alternatives for making a living. Spatial isolation creates *social isolation*. In addition, there is the increasing external threat of *state-sponsored gentrification* and *racial discrimination in the housing market* through the imposition of concepts such as *social mixing* at various levels. These cannot be combatted through physical violence and people living in urban "problem neighborhoods" today are not protected by the means available to them.

In all of these problem constellations, *normality* is being struggled with. How many people should live in one apartment? How many children should a family have? Who is responsible for the safety, the care and education of the children? The police? The community? When does someone have the ability to choose where they live and when do they not have that choice? When is someone considered "integrated"? Integrated into what? What is to be learned? What should people from urban "problem neighborhoods" learn and from whom? It is about the whole, about fundamental questions of our *migration society*. But as long as summits against youth violence and concepts such as *social mixing* remain the response to the frustration and rage that were taken to the streets on New Year's Eve 2022/2023, as long as people are talked *about* and not talked *to*, powerlessness, social isolation and the realization of protection needs in strictly hierarchical segregated structures maintained with violence remain a realistic possibility for action.

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How are the Kurds problematized and addressed by psychology theses in Turkey? A thematic analysis

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Abstract

The Kurdish issue and the representation of the Kurds have generally remained a relatively neglected topic among Turkish psychologists. We have recently demonstrated that a common lack of interest is closely related to the political atmosphere of the country. Despite this general neglect, there are a few researchers who have been interested in the Kurdish question recently. In this article, we investigate the language and discourse of these studies – one way or another – related to the Kurds in order to reveal the knowledge-power production relations in Turkish psychology. To this aim, we subjected psychology theses on Kurds, written between 2000 and 2019 to thematic analysis and examined how psychology deals with and defines the Kurds. As a result of the preliminary analyses, we have found that the distribution of theses is quantitatively concentrated in the social change period called the ‘Peace Process’ in Turkey (i.e., 2009-2015) with a diversity of topics, methods, and content. Thus, we selected a total of 32 theses; three of which correspond to the period before the Peace Process, fifteen correspond to the period of the Peace Process and fourteen correspond to the period after the Peace Process for the thematic analysis. The results show that the Kurds are mainly discussed within the meta-themes of “Kurdish Issue” and “Defining Kurdishness”, respectively. The Kurdish Issue consists of *State Oppression/Tyranny*, *Turkish-Kurdish Relations*, *the Kurdish question/problem*, and *Conflict & Violence* themes, respectively. On the other hand, Defining Kurdishness consists of *the Kurds*, *the Ignored*, *the Ethnocultural Minority* and *the Subordinate Group* themes, respectively. In this paper, we delve into a more elaborate picture of the results with examples from emerging themes and the transformation of these themes during the changing political atmosphere. We also address the relationship between authority/state and knowledge/academia in light of the hegemonic discourse of Turkishness in the Turkish Republic.

Keywords

Turkey, psychology thesis, the Kurds, the Kurdish issue, thematic analysis

¹ We have no conflict of interest to disclose.

The Kurds are recognized as the world's most populous 'stateless nation' with an estimated population of 25-30 million concentrated in the region along the borders of Turkey, Iraq, Iran, and Syria (see, MacDonald, 2012). Although their problems and goals differ in almost every issue from the alphabet they use to citizenship rights, from political representation to social struggles due to their political life in separate nation-states, Kurds have been one of the subjects of significant political and social tensions in the Middle East since World War I. This situation has resulted in the Kurds being at odds with the nation-states they are residing in throughout the 20th century. Scattered within the borders of four different countries, most of the Kurds live in areas within Turkey's borders. And Turkey differs from the other nation-states not only because it hosts this large Kurdish population, but also, its persistence in armed struggle against Kurdish movements. Especially with the emergence of the PKK (*Partiya Karkerên Kurdistan*), there was a serious increase in the securitization policies against the Kurds, many Kurdish settlements were evacuated in the 1990s and hundreds of thousands of people were forced to migrate (Gürses, 2018; A. Yılmaz, 2014). As of this day, it is estimated that more than 40 thousand people have been killed by paramilitary groups or in clashes between the Turkish armed forces and the PKK during this period of conflict (Işık, 2021). As a matter of fact, this conflict corresponds to a process defined by official authorities as a 'low-intensity war' and a political solution has yet to be implemented (Çiçek, 2018; Gürses, 2018; Kurban et al., 2008; Yılmaz, 2014).

Behind this heavy losses of life and property comes the Kurdish issue, one of Turkey's ethno-political problems which is as old as the modern republic (Yeğen, 1999). Due to the perception of homogeneous identity in Turkish nationalization, the Kurdish language was banned along with many other minority languages throughout the 20th century, Kurds were subjected to forced migration within the country and their political representation was tried to be obstructed with practices such as electoral threshold (Yeğen, 2013). This situation has been reflected in inter-ethnic relations as well; othering, exclusion, violence, and mass lynching attempts have been exercised towards the Kurds (Bora, 2021; KONDA, 2011; Şen, 2017). Although there have been state interventions against the severe human rights violations and systematic violence, these were improvements that completely ignored the ethno-political aspect of the issue and approached the problem with the assumption of 'regional underdevelopment', inevitably making the problem even more complex. In this sense, the Kurdish issue, which has been subjected to suppression and cover-up policies throughout the history of the Turkish republic, is a multi-layered social problem, and continues to be the most vexed issue of the Republic of Turkey. Although there has been a relative *détente* in the state's Kurdish policy since the 2000s, a new spiral of violence has been emerged with the failure of peace talks in Oslo between the PKK and state officials, and pressure on the Kurds' political and social rights have continued to increase with the coup attempt in 2016 (Ercan, 2013; Yılmaz, 2016).

Despite the burning nature of the Kurdish issue and its constant occupation of the country's agenda, academic studies on the Kurds are still limited (Scalbert-

Yücel & Ray, 2006). Undoubtedly, Turkish academics' close relationship with the founding doctrine of the republic (i.e., Kemalism), in which it has developed and flourished, has played a crucial role in this lack of interest. This close relationship between the founding doctrine of the republic and Turkish academics have also affected scientific approach to events, facts and problems to ensure that the academics are interested in certain questions and problems while they are not interested in seeing and hearing other ones (Ünlü, 2018). Therefore, the current situation of Kurds in academic studies is problematic (Çevik, 2019) and the space they occupy in psychology studies is also very limited as psychologists also prefer to ignore the Kurdish issue (Göregenli, 2010). In a systematic research we conducted recently, we have found that the indifference in psychology theses written between 2000-2019 is closely related to the political atmosphere; nonetheless, there are a limited number of graduate theses about Kurds written in different periods (Bayad et al., 2022). In another study, through texts written by leading figures in psychology throughout the 20th century, we scrutinized that Turkey's psychology community's lack of interest towards the Kurds is not actually something new, rather it was closely related to the modernization efforts of the Ottoman Empire, which was the predecessor of the Republic of Turkey, and it originates from a kind of 'domestic colonialism' (Bayad & Şen, 2023).

Despite the limitations of available studies, with the paradigm shift in Turkey in the 2000s (Aytürk, 2015), there has been an increase in academic interest in the Kurds even though it was a few. Examining these existing studies - by going beyond historical neglect- could help us to understand how the Kurds are reflected in psychology as a modern science and its academy as a community (see, Duncan et al., 2001). Although scientific practices are legitimized through claims of independence, scientific knowledge production is ultimately a sum of discursive practices as well, just like politics since scientists are also part of the broader society (Brown & Malone, 2004). Thus, the available studies in psychology, one of the areas where socio-political disinterest towards Kurds in Turkey is well hidden, are still of great importance to guide subsequent studies in terms of showing what language and discourse the academic community uses and revealing the transformation of knowledge-power relationship operating in the background of scientific practices (Vergin, 1999). Following this rationale, we aim to show how the studies about the Kurds on a scientific level problematize the Kurds, and how they represent them. For this purpose, in this article we discuss the relationship between authority and knowledge production in Turkey by revealing how the Kurds are problematized and represented in postgraduate theses written in the field of psychology via thematic analysis.

Knowledge-Power Relationship in Turkey and the Kurds

The relationship between knowledge and power forms the basis of post-structuralist thought (Gordon, 1980). According to this school of thought, the power to determine right and wrong is inherent in knowledge, especially modern

scientific knowledge, and it is an illusion that scientists are detached from it (see, Olympian Detachment, Reicher, 2001). It has been demonstrated through studies conducted in different contexts and times in the field of psychology, as in other areas of social sciences that scientific knowledge is a power in itself which is closely related to political authorities and ideologies (Bhatia, 2018; Duncan et al., 2001; Foucault, 2006). The focus of these studies is how political ideologies and authorities dominate scientific production in order to achieve their goals (i.e., via scientific institutions, via research and texts produced by scientists). Because political powers - mainly modern nation-states - need knowledge and people who produce knowledge to strengthen and legitimize their authority and position (Arslan, 1999). Within this context, throughout the 19th and 20th centuries, when nation-states began to take their place on the historical stage, they did not hesitate to use scientific institutions and communities – especially universities - in their current form to build a certain ‘national culture’, to train elites who would take part in the state administration and to protect the existing status quo (Duman, 2018). However, the academic community (hereafter, *academia*) producing and distributing scientific and artistic activities became on the hand an indispensably supportive or legitimizing milieu for nation-states, and on the other hand, it was also able to function as a space to question the legitimacy under the question and challenge the authority. Therefore, academia, which gained legitimacy with the support and approval of nation-states, quickly became the focus of social and political opposition (Vergin, 1999). Hereupon, governments felt the urge to keep universities under control and surveillance either openly or implicitly as a protective measure against academia’s resistance tendency and the threat it posed to their governance (Vergin, 1999). Despite the fact that the control and surveillance mechanisms of the state are more implicit and complex in liberal democracies with relatively independent and integrated academia, in anti-democratic countries where the basic motive is to protect the current political authority, such regulatory mechanisms can be more obvious and direct.

In this sense, the very introduction of modern science or scientific knowledge in Turkey with the modernization process is directly related to the nation-state formation, that is the strengthening of central political power (Dölen, 2010). For example, according to some researchers, the founders of modern science in Turkey are not scientists but bureaucrat intellectuals (see, Arslan, 1999; Duman, 2018). The symbiotic relationship between universities and the state in Turkey continued after the establishment of the republic and political powers were able to directly intervene in the university by purging many scientists at various intervals (Günel, 2013). Hence, Duman (2018) states that the ‘Turkish’ academics, seen as a ‘republican intellectual’ during the establishment phase of the nation-state, was assigned by the political power with the mission of ‘enlightening’ the people. According to him, Turkish intellectuals tried to establish ideological, philosophical, and historical foundations for the modernization project with the emergence of the republic and played an active role in social engineering conveyed by the republic. For example, historian Kılıç (2016) shows how psychological knowledge was instrumentalized for republican modernization via intelligence tests through its institutional history during this

period. On the other hand, Maksudyan (2005) documents how scientific racism has gained ground and developed in Turkey through anthropological academic writings.

Looking from this general perspective, it would not be wrong to say that the researchers who were punished most severely by the authorities were those who studied on the Kurds or the Kurdish issue. For example, İsmail Beşikçi was not only expelled from his position at the university and Turkish academia for his seminal work suggesting that ethnicity, as an analytical category, is a determining factor in social life but he also faced juristic trial many times and paid a heavy price by being kept in prison for many years (Ünlü & Değer, 2011; van Bruinessen, 2011). Apart from this individual case, after the petition campaign² calling for a cessation of military operations against the Kurdish movement in south-eastern Turkey in 2016 and a return to a peace negotiations, hundreds of academics were expelled from universities and were faced a ‘civil death’ (Gencel-Bek, 2018; Özgür, 2022). Another recent example is the case of Güllistan Yarkın, who completed her sociology doctorate in the USA in 2017 with her study on Turkish-Kurdish relations but her doctoral equivalence validity in Turkish universities was rejected on the grounds that some concepts and expressions used in her thesis ‘could constitute a crime’ (Yarkın, 2022). As can be understood from these examples, political power’s intervention in scientific knowledge can be much more direct and harsher in Turkey, especially when it comes to Kurds and the Kurdish issue (Scalbert-Yücel & Ray, 2006). But where does this intolerance towards scientific activities about the Kurds come from?

Kurds of Turkey as an ‘Issue’

Although there are many different ethnic and cultural groups in Turkey, the Kurds, constituting the largest group after the Turks, are the biggest minority despite the fact that their political and cultural rights were not recognized (Çevik, 2019). However, there is no consensus on the number of the Kurdish population living in Turkey since ethnic affiliation has not been asked in population censuses since the 1960s (Aslan et al., 2015). Nevertheless, according to studies based on representative sampling techniques, the Kurds make up about 19% of the society (KONDA, 2022). Despite having such a large population, the Kurds along with other ethnic and religious groups were either ignored or overlooked by the unitarian political structure of the newly established republic and its nationalist and authoritarian ideology, Kemalism (Aktürk, 2015; Yeğen, 2013). In fact, the newly established state was registered as a unitary state, the citizenship definition was restructured as "Turkish", and Turkish was determined

² The petition campaign initiated by a group of academics in 2016 is known to the public as the ‘Academics for Peace’ case because it aimed to return to the Peace Process that ended in 2015 and to stop the military operations that were ongoing at that time. When the campaign was signed by over 2000 academics and attracted attention in national and international public, signatories faced reactions from President Erdoğan himself. Subsequently, many signatories were subjected to administrative and judicial investigations and punished in various ways (see, <https://afp.hypotheses.org/>; <https://barisicinakademisyenler.net/English>).

as the official language with the 1924 Constitution. In 1925 with the Law on the Maintenance of Order (*Takrir-i Sükûn Kanunu*) tens of thousands of Kurds who rebelled under Sheikh Said's leadership were killed and thousands were exiled to the west of Turkey. In 1934 with the Settlement Law (*İskân Kanunu*) a new assimilation policy was implemented through collective and compulsory resettlement for non-Turkish minorities. Subsequently, with the Provincial Administration Law in 1949 (*İl İdaresi Kanunu*) Kurdish place names were Turkified. With another law in 1972 speaking and reading in Kurdish and giving Kurdish names to children was banned (McDowall, 2004; van Bruinessen, 1992). The state of siege, which was declared for all of Turkey after the military coup in 1980, was changed into a state of emergency (i.e., OHAL) in 1987 only for the Kurdish dominated cities. The state of emergency which lasted for 15 years left behind evacuated villages, millions of displaced people, and still unsolved unidentified murders (Işık, 2021; Kurban et al., 2008).

Due to understanding of the nation and definition of citizenship in Turkey - founded on Turkishness- the systematic assimilation practices exemplified above, the pressure and ignorance towards groups, continued to increase in the following years, even if the political powers have changed (Bozarslan, 2008; Üstel, 2004). Even though Turkey's citizenship regime, putting Turkish identity at the centre of national identity and ignoring ethnocultural differences, is a problem for many groups, it would not be wrong to say that the greatest discontent and reaction came from the Kurds. Because of the construction and domination of the Turkish national identity, the regime's intervention or restrictions on the places, lifestyles, culture, and language of the Kurds caused objections and from time to time various conflicts (van Bruinessen, 1992). However, the social destruction caused by the 1980 military coup, the violence it created, and the torture exercised in the Diyarbakır prison resulted in massification, regionalization, and armament of the Kurdish political movement, which until then consisted only of student movements or local uprisings, marks the beginning of the longest armed conflicts in the history of the republic (Gürses, 2018). On the other hand, the long-standing military and political conflict has resulted in social tension and polarization between the Turkish and Kurdish ethnic groups, the impact of which is still ongoing (Bilgiç et al., 2014; Bora, 2021; KONDA, 2011; Şen, 2017).

This problem, which mostly the Kurds are exposed to but concerns the whole society in Turkey, still remains on the agenda of the country with various denominations by different segments such as “the Kurdish Problem”, “the South-eastern Problem”, “the Terror Problem”, “the Economic Underdevelopment Problem”, “the Democracy Problem”, “the Turkish Problem”. On the other hand, Yeğen (1999, 2013) showed that the Turkish state also defines the Kurdish issue with the technical and bureaucratic terms like “reactionism”, “tribal resistance”, “banditry”, “foreign provocation” and “regional underdevelopment” that as if it does not require a social change by excluding ethnopolitical scope of the problem. This dominant discourse represented by the state denies the connection of the issue with Kurds or their cultural and political rights and also prevents a possible interaction between the Kurdish political movement and the Turkish

society. Therefore, it can be said that one of the main reasons for the academia's lack of interest in the Kurdish issue is that the state imposes a security-oriented approach by 'terrorizing' the matter. However, there is a direct relationship between the emergence of this problem and Turkey's modernization adventure spreading over the last two hundred years of social history and consisting of major social processes such as centralization, nationalization, and secularization (Yeğen, 2007, 2013). As a matter of fact, 'Kurdish issue' is a grand problem that cannot be reduced only to Kurds, Turks or activists working on this issue. This problem corresponds to the largest social segment in the society since it covers the two most populous ethnic groups of the society, the Turks and the Kurds (Mutlu, 1996; Zeyneloğlu et al., 2011), to the state-citizen relationship, which functions as the building block of the society due to Turkey's unitarian nation-state ideology (Aktürk, 2015) and furthermore considering the military operations and expenditures since the republic's history, it is among one of Turkey's costliest social problems (Khalid & Habimana, 2021). This social problem, which has such a sociological scope and historical depth, has undoubtedly attracted the attention of researchers from many disciplines from sociology to political sciences, from history to geography, from literature to art and has been the subject of many scholarly works until today (e.g., Beşikçi, 1969; Cemal, 2003; Hassanpour, 2005; Jwaideh, 2014; Şen, 2019; van Bruinessen, 1992; Yeğen, 2006; Zeki, 2014). However, academia of psychology, that claims to have a universal and non-ideological approach prefers to keep a conscious distance towards the Kurdish issue and stay silent to this problem despite having a relatively long history in Turkey (Avcı, 2015; Bayad et al., 2022; Göregenli, 2010).

Academia of Psychology and the Kurds

Although its history in Turkey dates back quite a long time, the introduction and development of modern psychology into Turkey have always remained in the shadow of political authority (Batur, 2003; Bayad & Şen, 2023). For example, McKinney (1960) states that despite being modern, early started psychology education in Turkey was not able to fully develop because of the authoritarian education system. Because, republican modernization preferred to discipline all universities as well as psychology departments with a top-down fashion in line with Turkish History Thesis³ and from early on silenced dissenting voices like Muzaffer Şerif Başoğlu who had explicitly anti-fascist ideas (Batur, 2012). Moreover, psychology was used as a disciplinary tool for the education reforms of the era rather than dealing with social problems (Kılıç, 2016).

³ According to the Turkish History Thesis formed in the early 1930s under the leadership of a series of Turkish intellectuals and politicians, the cradle of civilization is Central Asia. And Turks migrated to various regions of the world carrying civilization to places they went, leading the formation of the world civilization (Sivrioğlu, 2015).

While agricultural policies implemented in line with the Marshall Plan⁴ along with the country's largest enclosure movement in the 1960s, dissolved traditional Kurdish lifestyle and caused mass migration waves towards city centres and western provinces (McDowall, 2004) which brought the first public encounter with Kurds in the west of the country (Natali, 2009). Although the social and cultural change was a research topic in psychology departments during this period (see, Turhan, 1964), these studies generally aimed at disciplining groups that were not Turkish, urban and modern with an assimilationist perspective in line with republican reforms (Bayad & Şen, 2023). On the other hand, albeit rare, social psychology studies were conducted on the Kurds during this very period (see, Başaran, 1969). These were studies that completely ignored the ethno-political aspect of the issue and evaluated the matter from the perspective of regional "underdevelopment and isolation" (Yeğen, 2006). Similarly, after the military memorandum in the 1970s, the lack of institutionalization and social organization to meet the changing social structure led a constantly growing economic crisis and political polarization that turned into blood feuds across country (Natali, 2009). However, throughout this process, social psychologists preferred to work mainly on family and culture models that 'constitute an obstacle' for the modernization process (see, Kağıtçıbaşı, 1973).

While during 1980s, on one hand state universities were brought under the state control through The Council of Higher Education (YÖK) which was established after the military coup, on the other hand the state paved the way for popularization of private universities by allocating public lands and funds to foundations (Aslan, 2014; Birlir, 2012). The reflection of this structural change in psychology manifests itself with the instrumentalization of academic psychology (Namer et al., 2015). The instrumentalization of academic psychology can also be seen through the increase in the number of private universities and students. As a matter of fact, the study conducted by Er and Duman (2001) clearly presents this situation. According to this study, by end of the 1990s the number of students enrolled in psychology departments increased by 6-7 times compared to the 1980s (Er & Duman, 2001). According to Gülerce (2006) the spread of consumer behaviours as well as individualistic capitalist values in society during these years transformed applied psychology into a manipulative power and engaged it in pop culture. On the other hand, psychologists, who had been content with -just- observing modernization until then, concentrated on raising 'good citizens' by focusing on child-rearing practices and mother literacy with the support of the government and society at the time. But interest in actual social problems was very limited during this period due to politics shaped by military dictatorship, neoliberal economic policies and YÖK's supervision of universities. Especially social problems like intensifying war, displacement, or disappearances in custody especially in

⁴ The Marshall Plan which Turkey joined following its NATO membership brought along a large mechanization movement targeting agricultural activities. For example, even in the first period covering 1948-1956 both agricultural motor vehicles and the amount of cultivatable land increased incredibly (Özer, 2014). According to Tekeli (2008), agricultural mechanization, not only by creating new landless peasants but also by subjecting rural life to structural transformation, has explanatory power for the large-scale migration from village to city.

regions where Kurds densely live, did not attract the attention of the academia of psychology.

The Justice and Development Party -AKP- (*Adalet ve Kalkınma Partisi*) government, which has a different political tradition from the founding elites of the republic, started the 21st century with various reforms and ended the state of emergency in 2002, which had been in force in the cities where the Kurds live since 1987. At the same time, with the influence of the liberal political atmosphere provided by European Union membership negotiations, the AKP government started ‘the initiative movement’ known as the Peace Process⁵ in public. This process aimed at confronting the official paradigm based on denial and rejection towards minorities, especially the Kurds, to initiate a social peace with these groups. These developments, which reached their peak with declaration of Peace Process, positively reflected not only on the lives of the Kurds (Çiçek, 2018) but also on the field studies conducted on the Kurdish issue that led a growth in knowledge production under the lead of non-governmental organizations (Scalbert-Yücel & Ray, 2006). Similarly, awareness about social problems also increased within the academia of psychology. For example, during this period critical psychology studies started (Batur & Aslıtürk, 2006), the Association of Psychologists for Social Solidarity (TODAP) - prioritizing social problems - was established (Kayaoğlu & Batur, 2013) and criticism about silence on the Kurdish issue has risen (Göregenli, 2010). Nevertheless, the AKP government’s return to policies within the framework of the state security brought along an authoritarian understanding and distanced Turkey from the EU harmonization process (see, Sertdemir Özdemir & Özyürek, 2019; Yılmaz, 2016). And re-emergence of state violence in the Kurdish regions suppressed both social and academic life again more than ever.

As it can be seen from this brief historical evaluation, the tendency seen in a large part of the Turkish academia has also manifested itself among psychology researchers and the academia, that is, they have preferred to close their eyes to certain problems and questions. This implicit agreement that prevented the production of information about ethnic and religious minorities such as the Kurds, Greeks and Armenians as well as their role in social life (Ünlü, 2018), caused limited academic production about groups outside the official identity (Çevik, 2019). This limitation decreased relatively during the Peace Process and psychological knowledge production was also affected by preference and discourse changing according to the periodic policies of the political authorities (Bayad et al., 2022). However, it has not yet been examined how studies, conducted at certain intervals and in limited numbers on this issue that have been suppressed for so long, problematized and represented the Kurds. For the future of social sciences and the disciplinary self-reflection, it is of utmost importance to reveal how knowledge production in the country in question was affected after long authoritarian regimes (see, Bhatia, 2018; Duncan et al., 2001). Due to the

⁵ It is the official proceedings and negotiation process carried out between 2009-2015 to end the long-standing military conflict between the Republic of Turkey and the PKK. Different definitions for the same period such as *the Solution Process*, *the Kurdish Initiative*, *the Democratic Initiative* are also used by the public (Çiçek 2018).

fact that the Peace Process implemented in Turkey caused relative academic freedom -at least on the Kurdish issue- between two different repressive periods, this might allow us to understand to what extent different political authorities influence scientific knowledge production. That is why in this study, we examine theses written about the Kurds as a reflection of the academia of psychology following the political authorities. The main purpose of examining these theses is that they are controlled, and their frameworks are drawn by university administrations and academic advisors as executives or subjects of political authorities in the academia. Scientific theses are important in a sense that they show which subjects are popular or which subjects stand out and they reflect the academic understanding of the discipline, that is, what knowledge is produced in the relevant discipline, which functions it fulfils and what knowledge is preferred to be produced (Finlay et al., 2012; Sevinç, 2013).

Method

In this study, we subjected 32 psychology theses, which we previously obtained in a descriptive analysis covering the years 2000-2019 (Bayad et al., 2022), to thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Thematic analysis is a qualitative method frequently used to take into account the intertextual political and historical context while mapping out prominent subjects or themes in a given literature or field (Clarke et al., 2015; Shukla et al., 2019).

The texts analysed here were included in the dataset from the Higher Education Council National Thesis Centre (YÖKTEZ)⁶ database by examining the titles, abstracts, or contents of 3952 theses registered in the psychology department. We chose those directly or indirectly refer to the Kurds in their sample, research question or problem for the thematic analysis (see, Bayad et al., 2022). Despite the fact that about half of the theses in the dataset was written in the social psychology departments, research on the Kurds is also coming from the sub-fields of clinical, developmental or general psychology. This disproportion across the sub-fields shows that the Kurds have been mainly a subject of social psychology research through identity and recognition dimensions, as it is a politicized issue, rather than other psychological processes. However, instead of a specific examination of the role or influence of sub-fields in this study, we tried to reach an overarching discourse that represents or spreads across all psychology studies. The main purpose of choosing this method is to show whether these studies on Kurds, written in different times, universities, and sub-fields of psychology, have a pattern that goes beyond the theoretical and methodological preferences, stylistic and linguistic features of the texts which covers the general knowledge production of psychology in Turkey. We also aim to reveal the relationship of such pattern with the political authority during social transformation processes, namely Peace Process.

⁶ YÖKTEZ is an open-access electronic database for postgraduate theses within the framework of the provisions of Article 40 of the Higher Education Law No. 2547 aiming to contribute to science and support scientific research and activities.

Analytical Strategy

We started the thematic analysis by (1) examining the dataset consisting of theses according to the six-stage analysis process proposed by Braun and Clarke (2006). In the first stage, we noticed that during the Peace Process the distribution of theses over time diversified both numerically and in terms of content of the subjects, so we divided the dataset into three groups: *before* the Peace Process (BPP, 2002-2010), *during* the Peace Process (DPP, 2011-2015) and *after* the Peace Process (APP, 2016-2019). Although this periodic classification is not representative, it corresponds to both the paradigm shift and social transformations in the historical trajectory summarized above. For example, BPP is the period when the Kemalist paradigm of the republic is still in power, DPP is the period when founding paradigm begins to wear out and social opposition strengthens, and APP is the period when a new authoritarian paradigm is consolidated (see, Aytürk, 2015; Çiçek, 2018). In the second stage of the analysis, the first author performed the initial coding that lasted until a saturation was achieved. (2) At this stage, instead of focusing on the whole dataset we selected a total of 13 theses: two representing theses written in BPP, five representing theses written in DPP and six representing those written in APP. Again, instead of focusing on the theses entirely, the *introduction* section, where general information is given for the purpose of the research, the *historical background* section, where references are given to historical issues related to the Kurds, the *literature review* section, where the research problem is conceptualized and associated to sampling, and finally, the *method* section, where participant/sampling information is presented were subjected to inductive coding through the Atlas.Ti program. At this stage, we generated 23 codes. Although the material to be analysed was determined by pre-selection and certain parts of texts were prioritized in order to limit the scope of initial coding, selected thesis and sections were examined thoroughly during the initial coding. For instance, all the passages referring the concept the Kurd(s) were carefully assessed by focusing on how the authors problematize Kurds. However, as we continue, we realized that a certain ‘Kurdishness’ was also defined in the theses alongside the problematization. Thus, we included the notion how Kurds were represented as a secondary focus in the analysis. (3) As a result of the discussions carried out with other authors, obtained initial codes were categorized to reach out the first code system consisting of two meta-themes, nine themes and 15 sub-themes. (4) Then, the authors, who did not take part in the initial coding, coded the remaining 20 theses based on the first code system according to the deductive coding principle. However, new codes and themes were also suggested at this stage, though in small numbers. (5) Finally, after all the authors got to know the material and learned the code system, a total of 27 codes - with the additions during stage four - were placed in the final code system consisting of 16 *sub-themes*, 8 *themes*, and 2 *meta-themes* as a result of final discussion and consensus. In addition, at this stage we applied cross-tabulation to the code system based on years and the periodization determined in the first stage of analysis in order to make periodic comparisons. (6) In the final stage, after the

general evaluation where all authors participated, the final forms of concepts and wording used in the code system were determined, and the thematic analysis was completed by selecting quotations for reporting (see, Table 1).

Analysis & Results

The Kurds are mostly discussed in the meta-themes '*the Kurdish Issue*' and '*Defining Kurdishness*' in the psychology theses. While acquired themes in the first meta-theme correspond to historical, social, and political dimensions of the Kurdish issue, themes in the second meta-theme can be seen as an effort to define the Kurds as a group correspond to dominant positions in psychology literature. Furthermore, the distribution of the repetition of themes (i.e., frequency) calculated from the number of coded segments (i.e., quotations) over years and periodisation also shows that both the dimensions of the Kurdish issue and the positionings in defining the Kurds have changed over time. Below, we explain and exemplify themes along with quotations from relevant psychology theses by prioritizing those with high-frequency. This choice does not mean that low-frequency themes are unimportant. However, we give priority to comprehensive themes so that we can show in which issues the Kurds are mainly represented in psychology theses.

1. The Kurdish Issue

In psychology theses, the Kurds, though sometimes going beyond, are generally discussed with their geographical, social, and political presence in Turkey. This situation, when discussing the Kurds, brings about the highlighting of various problems associated with them rather than dealing with them just as a population. Although the Kurds are mostly presented as the victims of these problems, the 'problems' surrounding the claims of social and political rights of the Kurds are discussed in a context that highlight the negative influence on them and sometimes even goes far beyond them. Therefore, the meta-theme of '*the Kurdish Issue*' refers to the problematizations, of which the Kurds are sometimes subjects and sometimes objects, and that are applied for justification of the research question and design in psychology theses. However, the 'problems' associated with the Kurds in psychology theses have a very wide variety covering historical, sociological, and political domains since what is considered as a problem (or not) varies according to the time when the theses were written and the ideological position of the authors. That is why, while naming this meta-theme, we preferred to use the word *issue* that goes beyond their current problems and the numerical volume of the Kurdish population (see, Yeğen, 2007).

Table 1. The themes show the problematization and representation forms of the Kurds in psychology theses and their frequencies according to the Peace Process periodization.

Meta-theme	Theme	Sub-theme	BPP	DPP	APP	Total
The Kurdish Issue	State Oppression / Tyranny		1	91	39	131
		Assimilation / Denial	1	36	17	54
		Against Kurdish civilians		40	13	53
		Towards Kurdish politics		15	9	24
	Turkish-Kurdish Relations		1	60	39	100
		Nationalism and Polarization	1	14	8	23
		Intergroup relations		10	18	28
		Discrimination & Othering		36	13	49
	Kurdish Question / Problem			48	17	65
		Defining the Kurdish quest.		21	7	28
		Peace- Solution- Initiative Pro.		27	10	37
	Conflict & Violence		5	32	21	58
		Deprivations		19	13	32
		Forced migration	5	13	8	26
Sub-total						354
Defining Kurdishness	The Kurdish		2	60	41	103
	The Ignored		2	17	43	62
	The Ethnocultural Minority		11	26	32	69
		Ethnic minority	7	22	31	60
		Cultural Minority	4	4	1	9
	The Subordinate Group		3	10	23	36
		Disadvantaged Group	2	5	11	18
		Social Identity	1	5	12	18
Sub-total						270
Total						624

Note: BPP refers to Before the Peace Process (2002-2010), DPP refers to During the Peace Process (2011-2015) and APP refers to After the Peace Process (2016-2019).

This meta-theme was formed from the *State Oppression / Tyranny*, *Turkish-Kurdish Relations*, *Kurdish Question / Problem* and *Conflict & Violence* themes respectively (see, Table 1). All of these ‘reasons’, used for the presentation research problem in the theses, are generally utilized strategically depending to the purpose of the research rather than forming a consistent wholeness or continuity across the dataset. In other words, just one or sometimes more of these themes are used in psychology theses to provide a background, a social or political justification for the conducted research. For example, a thesis written on the trauma due to forced migration pays more attention to the conflict and violence emerged in Kurdish areas, or the pressure imposed by the state on civilians, while another thesis on intergroup relations puts more emphasis on the practices of exclusion and discrimination between Turks and Kurds in metropolises of Turkey. Below, we explain these themes by considering their scope across all theses and their transformation over time.

1.1. State Oppression / Tyranny

This theme corresponds to an assessment of the Kurdish issue through assimilation-denial of the Kurdish civilians or the institutionalized state oppression towards the Kurdish politicians. In other words, in this narrative problematized in the psychology theses, the backbone of the Kurdish issue consists of the systematic policies that directly target or ignore the Kurds and the Kurdish identity as an autonomous group. For example, practices like the Turkification of city and village names, the prohibition of traditional Kurdish clothing and educational activities based on Turkification that target or ignore the identity markers of the Kurdish people, are frequently mentioned with their historical references. Except for one particular study reporting that assimilation of Kurdish culture and identity has been carried out by other states, this narrative generally considers this oppression and tyranny to be associated with the history of the Turkish Republic. Furthermore, although the narrative of state oppression generally has continuity, this narrative takes up more space proportionally in the theses written during the period covering the Peace Process (i.e., DPP). Besides, in the theses written during this period not only on the symbolic and political consequences of the state oppression, but also its applications towards civilians and nature were more frequently emphasized. It would not be wrong to say that with this change, though just at the level of narration, the Kurds have experienced an equalization with other elements of the nation-state on the basis of rights. The following excerpt, from one of the theses written during the Peace Process, includes these wide range of wrongdoings which the Kurds were exposed to as a result of forced migration:

DPP-2014-6/28; ... during this period, more than three million people from about 3700 settlements had to leave the areas where they lived against their will. In the sixteen years of conflict, not only were settlements burned down and evacuated, but also going to highlands was banned and thousands of acres of forest were burned. In the evacuated, burned down and destroyed settlements, basic

infrastructure facilities like roads, water and electricity have also been destroyed. Fields have become unusable. Fruit gardens have been destroyed and the trees have been cut off....

Another tendency in quotations forming this theme is to focus on policies targeting the political representation of Kurds. Along with the pressure applied to the Kurdish civilians, the psychology theses also include the experiences of institutions, associations, and politicians, who are prominent because of their closeness to the Kurdish political movement. For example, the banning of political parties at various times or the imposition of political restrictions on politicians are frequently mentioned. Because in this narrative, bans or restrictions imposed on Kurdish parties and associations in Turkey are considered as an intolerance towards the existence of Kurdish identity in the public space as a parliamentary democracy. Similarly, especially in the theses written during the Peace Process, we come across more space and more up-to-date details in this regard. Below is an example of the oppression on the Kurdish political movement from a thesis written during Peace Process:

DPP-2014-3/17; ...during the 1990s and 2000s, Kurdish political parties were closed down by the Constitutional Court; while the existing political parties did not consider the demands of Kurds. Human rights violations, mass arrests of politicized Kurds, and restrictions on the political representation of Kurds continued throughout the 2000s...

The state oppression/tyranny theme usually emerges as a narrative that highlights policies targeting both Kurdish civilians and Kurdish political actors by the Turkish state. However, while this theme was very obscure before Peace Process, we found that it increases and diversifies proportionally with the Peace Process. During this period, official negotiations made between the state officials and the different actors of the Kurdish movement, particularly the PKK, brought along the legitimacy of political actors in psychology literature as well (Çevik, 2019; Çiçek, 2018). Although it is still used after Peace Process, we found that recently the emphasis on the *assimilation* dimension in the state oppression/tyranny narrative has increased while the violence narrative towards civilians and politicians has decreased.

1.2. Turkish-Kurdish Relations

It is possible to say that the Turkish-Kurdish relations theme also covers a considerable space in the way the Kurdish issue is handled in psychology theses. In this narrative, rather than the role of the state as a subject in the Kurdish issue, the negative attitudes, and behaviours of the Turkish and the Kurdish people towards each other are problematized in the context of *nationalism-polarization*, *intergroup relations* and *discrimination-othering* respectively. Even though the Turks and Kurds have been in close relationships both geographically and historically, the political developments in the last two centuries have also

affected the relationships between the two groups (Bilgiç et al., 2014; Bora, 2021). However, it seems that naming and framing unfavourable relationships between parties is based on a certain hierarchy. For example, although empirical studies have shown that the Turks have more negative attitudes towards the Kurds both quantitatively and qualitatively (Şen, 2019; Yılmaz et al., 2018), the most preferred manner in psychology theses is to bring forward the responsibility of both sides through nationalism and polarization involving a certain level of reciprocity. In this narrative, reactive Kurdish nationalism is assumed to be a threat to social coexistence though it is generally emphasized that the Kurds have been subjected to marginalization and discrimination under the name of Turkish nationalism throughout the history of the republic. As can be seen from the excerpt below, ongoing conflictual environment is shown as a reason for the rise of mutual nationalist attitudes of both groups:

DPP-2014-4/68: ...In short, the 30-year conflict and violent environment have become a serious threat to social harmony. The loss of life and damage caused by conflict and violence has increased social and political polarization; it has raised Turkish and Kurdish nationalism...

This narrative, which problematizes nationalism in general, has increased considerably during the Peace Process, it has been used less frequently afterwards. On the other hand, after the Peace Process, we observe that the emphasis on 'Intergroup Relations' increases in accordance with psychology terminology. This narrative specifically features many psychological factors such as intergroup contact, in-group favouritism, partisanship and stereotypes that aim to reducing social tension between the Kurds and Turks rather than nationalism. By doing so, it prioritizes micro-level explanations for the solution of the Kurdish issue. In the excerpt below, from a thesis written after the Peace Period, the focus is on the micro level relationships between Turkish and Kurdish students:

APP-2019-9/20: ...Within the scope of this thesis study... attitudes that can change, intergroup friendship, positive-negative contact, anxiety, empathy and contact towards out-group members... among the Turkish and Kurdish university students sharing the same room were examined...

Examining the Kurdish issue through discrimination and marginalization experienced by the Kurds constitutes the least preferred narrative. Although this narrative increased and became dominant during the Peace Process, it continues to remain the least preferred theme in terms of Turkish-Kurdish relations after the Peace Process. Taken as a whole, the Turkish-Kurdish Relations theme corresponds to a narrative that blurs the historical, political, and social power hierarchy of the parties and equates the Kurds with the Turks in terms of 'wrongdoings.' Furthermore, this narrative, along with a set of concepts compatible with psychology terminology such as 'intergroup relations', shows an increasing trend implying it gets a relatively little impact from the termination of the Peace Process. This situation might be indicating that the Kurds and Kurdish

issue are examined more and more via a concept of ‘social polarization’ that disconnects the matter from its historical and political context, which is also quite prominent among the international community of psychology (see, Van Bavel & Pereira, 2018).

1.3. Kurdish Question / Problem

Another frequently mentioned topics in psychology theses when talking about the Kurdish issue is the very *Kurdish question / problem* (see, Akpınar, 2009; Yeğen, 2013). Because just like in the broader literature, it is possible in the psychology theses to come across different perspectives and a continuous attempt to define what the Kurdish issue is. In this sense, it cannot be said that there is a definition of the Kurdish issue which all researchers agree on or on which a consensus is reached in theses. Nevertheless, efforts to define the problem, as can be expected, diversifies as expectations of political solution is increased - for example during the Peace Process - and then decreases afterwards. Although the examples we have are limited, after the Peace Process this diversity decreases relatively and the ‘problem’, which spread to the political field in terms of ending the armed conflict waiting for a solution, began to become the main source to define the Kurdish issue. In the excerpt below, in a thesis written after the Peace Process, the Kurdish question / problem found itself a place in the historical narrative as an extension of the Kurdish issue:

APP-2019-13/26: ...The conflict between Kurds, who are probably the group that encounters Turkish security forces most often, has been maintained for many years and has been named as “Kurdish Question,” “Kurdish Issue” or “Kurdish Problem.” Some analysts think it is a problem stemming from Kurdish military forces and some others assert it is a critical issue to be solved by listening to each group...

Besides, we see that the Peace Process in recent years, where we witnessed political steps taken towards solving the Kurdish problem, also found itself a place in theses. Again, as expected, the use of this theme increases during the Peace Process and decreases afterwards. Since the authors of the theses use this process as a legitimate ground for solving the ongoing tense and problematic Kurdish issue or as a current reference for problems outlined in the thesis, we can see this narrative as a reflection of current discussions shaped around the Kurdish issue in theses. For example, in the excerpt below, there is a direct reference to Peace Process as a burning issue:

DPP-2014-4/61: ...In order to eliminate this threat, various initiatives have been taken by governments until today to solve the problem. The last of these initiatives is the peace/solution process that started at the beginning of 2013...

However, the efforts to define the Kurdish issue and the frequency of using the Peace Process as a current reference framework has decreased with the end of the

process in question, though it is possible to see an increase again, especially since 2019. This finding shows us that the Peace Process has ceased to be a legitimate political ground for scientific research and has begun to be interpreted as a short period of broader the Kurdish Issue and historical development between the parties. In the excerpt below, the Peace Process has become a missed opportunity in the past:

APP-2019-11/19: ...In 2013, a negotiation and ceasefire period started, raising hopes for lasting peace; however, negotiations ended and armed conflict resumed in 2015...

The Kurdish question / problem theme represents a short and highly political aspect of the Kurdish issue which is spreading to a wider extent. Yet, though it lasted short in terms of Turkish political history, started and ended at the political level without having the chance to socialize, we can say that it occupies a considerable space in psychology theses. This situation can be seen as a socio-political ground for scientific studies in the theses as well as an effort to define and make sense of the 'problems' that occur around the Kurds.

1.4. Conflict & Violence

The last narrative that makes up the Kurdish issue is to focus on the destruction especially resultant of the military dimension of the issue, which is problematizing the impact of conflict and violence on people. The focus of this theme is the forced migration of the Kurds from the places they lived, and the deprivations related to accommodation, health, and education which they faced in the places they migrated. Unlike other themes that make up the meta-theme of the Kurdish issue, the Conflict & Violence theme is a narrative that was in use even before the Peace Process. When we consider the practices that spread over a long period of time and resulted in the displacement of the Kurdish population, it can be argued that problems such as forced migration and ghettoization in western cities have found their place in psychology as a 'depoliticized realm'. Indeed, in theses written before the Peace Process, the Kurds or the Kurdish issue are seen more as negative consequences of 'low-intensity war' conducted by the state rather than a problem on its own. In the excerpt below, forced migration is problematized as a result of the war:

BPP-2002-2/1: ...The main type of migration that determines the internal migration movement in the last 10-15 years is forced migration. Low-intensity war that has continued in a part of Turkey (Eastern Anatolia and Southeastern Anatolia regions), policies to prevent low-intensity war and the negative social, economic and cultural conditions caused by low-intensity war have led to the forced migration of an estimated 4 to 4.5 million people...

However, in the following years the interest and emphasis on this issue remained at a relatively low level and was limited to historical background since forced

migration practices were the result of military operations back in the 1990s. Yet interest in and emphasis on deprivations experienced after displacements continue to increase in psychology theses. In recent studies, unlike previous ones, deprivations are more openly associated with the Kurdish issue and narrated with the influence of the relatively liberal atmosphere experienced with the Peace Process. For example, in the excerpt below, forced migration and problems experienced with this migration are linked to forcefully displacement of people:

APP-2019-11/33: ...Between 1986 and 2005, around 1 million people were displaced from these cities (Hacettepe University Institution of Population Studies, 2006). During this period, many families migrated from the conflict zone to urban areas which posed other difficulties such as socioeconomic adversity, discrimination, child labor, and an increased instance of drop-outs from schools (e.g., Basak Culture and Art Foundation, 2010; Sevim, 2001; Yüксеker, 2011). These difficulties were accompanied by problems in adaptation, language and communication, and psychological well-being (Basak Culture and Art Foundation, 2004) ...

Taking together, it can be said that the Conflict & Violence narrative focuses on victims rather than the Kurdish people as a whole since it focuses on people directly affected by the conflict and the problems they are exposed to. For this reason, we observe that this narrative concentrates on sub-fields such as clinical and developmental psychology rather than social psychology which constitutes the majority of the theses. Nonetheless, this narrative, which has found itself space in psychology since the early 2000s, can be evaluated as an effort to highlight the victimization in order to break the silence about the Kurds in the field of psychology.

2. Defining Kurdishness

While examining how the Kurds are problematized in psychology theses, apart from the socio-political problems associated with them, we noticed that there has been a considerable change both among authors and over time in naming and defining the Kurds as an autonomous group, including those participating in the research. We knew from both relevant literature (Scalbert-Yücel & Ray, 2006) and our own experiences as researchers working in this field that this situation could be explained by (auto)censorship, that is frequently encountered in Kurdish studies. However, we are not yet aware of a study showing that the (auto)censorship mechanism, beyond scientific research practices, is evident in naming the participants.

That is why, in psychology theses that make up our dataset, we paid special attention not only to the structure of the language and choice of vocabulary used to define the Kurds, but also, to the changes in these definitions over time. Since the indicators to point out Kurdishness ranging from the regions Kurds live to the language they speak, or from cultural differences to their positions in the ethnic hierarchy, are instrumented as adjectives or explanations that define the Kurds,

we named this meta-theme as ‘*Defining Kurdishness*’. This meta-theme consists of themes *the Kurdish*, *the Ignored*, *the Ethnocultural Minority*, and *the Subordinate Group*, respectively (see, Table 1).

In the psychology theses, the Kurds are usually introduced on the grounds that they constitute a case or an example for a given research question or approach, to make them suitable to test the preferred theories and approaches. For example, in a thesis focusing on processes between social minorities and the majority, the Kurds are marked as an ethnic or cultural minority -despite they are not recognized as having a minority status in any legal regulation in Turkey-, while in another thesis focusing on identity formation or development processes, they can be defined as subordinate group. In the following sections, we explain these themes in an order taking into account their scope across all the dataset and the changes they have undergone over time.

2.1. The Kurds

This theme directly corresponds to marking the Kurdish people as ‘the Kurds’ without going into any other adjective or explanation while describing Kurdishness. This narrative, which is widely used in theses under the question, is rarely used before the Peace Process that is utilized mostly introducing the sample and providing information about the participants. Moreover, we observed that Kurdish people’s official relationship with Turkey through citizenship were especially emphasized in this period:

BPP-2009-26/1: ...in Turkey, while Kurdish people can identify themselves with all citizens in Turkey...

During the Peace Process on the other hand, with the Kurds themes reaching its highest frequency of use, it is possible to see various uses of Kurdishness as a social category, autonomous group identity and reference frame in many fields from the people to society, from identity to history, from politics to language:

APP-2019-11/16: ...Kurds are the largest non-Turkish ethnic minority group in Turkey, constituting 17.2% of the overall population, and mainly reside (60%) in the eastern part of Turkey...

After the Peace Process, although the frequency of use of this theme decreases slightly, the diversity in its use continues.

2.2. The Ignored

When forming this theme, we noticed that neutral expressions to impersonalize the sample such as “*participants, local people, regional people, population*” were used to hide the Kurdish identity and Kurdishness, even though there were indicators such as the region they lived in or the language they spoke indicating

that the sample subject to research was somehow Kurdish. What the authors of the theses do not say or what they avoid saying while naming something is also important for our analysis. Because not using a specific term or concept is an attempt to hide what is otherwise obvious by expressing it with some other words. For example, we can talk about a Kurdishness that is covered up or deliberately ignored through the concept of *citizens*. Since citizen is a legal concept defining not only the Kurds but everyone living in the geographical region in question, this way of expression serves as a kind of ignoring function in theses when it is needed.

The Ignored narrative intensifies in the method sections, where individuals recruited for the research are defined, rather than in other parts of the theses. Because we can say that here is where the authors are somehow forced to define Kurdishness while it is not necessary to indicate the Kurds in other parts of the theses due to fact that introduction of participants take place in methodology. In this sense, we frequently encountered the Ignored theme throughout all theses and the examined time frame (i.e., 2000-2019). For instance, the word “participants” exemplified in the excerpt below is a common strategy:

DPP-2014-6/32: ...The research population consists of participants who migrated to Istanbul from the Eastern and Southeastern Anatolia Region between 1980 and 2000; its sample consists of 33% (N=53) women and 67% (N=107) men, a total of 160 people...

However, we noticed that with the influence of the increasing political pressure, the frequency and variations of the usage of this narrative showed a constant increase throughout the time frame under the question, especially after the Peace Process. When the political and ideological positionings of the concepts are considered, despite being symbolic, words such as ‘population’ that purify people from their cultural, social, and historical characteristics have only emerged in this period:

APP-2019-10/1: ...In this context, the subject of the research is the evaluation of the population living in Eastern and Southeastern Anatolia in terms of executive functions and complex attention and revealing possible differences...

When considered as a whole, the narrative forming the Ignored theme can be considered as an effort not to see Kurds as an autonomous group. Furthermore, when it is necessary to identify the Kurds, this narrative defines a sphere of existence for them by resorting to the region and local names determined by the nation-state, that is, it conceals their autonomous existence (e.g., Southeastern Anatolia).

2.3. The Ethnocultural Minority

Another framework used when indicating the Kurds is referring to ethnocultural hierarchy. In this narrative, the Kurds are mentioned as an ethnic or cultural

minority compared to the Turks who constitute the majority in Turkey. Although the Kurds are traditionally quite heterogeneous in terms of language, religion and culture and do not have an official minority status in Turkey, in this narrative it is assumed that Kurdishness functions as a collective identity in a society where Turks are politically and culturally superior or dominant. This tendency can be seen together with the rise of the multiculturalism debate in Europe and the focus of social psychological research on the social integration of minorities (see, Verkuyten, 2007). However, it is not possible to talk about a consensus on what determines minority status in psychology theses. For example, speaking Kurdish, self-reported identity, the region Kurds lived in, or being a member of the numerical minority compared to the Turks can be used by different authors and at different times as indicators of the Kurdish minority. Still, if we make a temporal comparison, it is possible to say that before the Peace Process, Kurds were represented among existing minorities through being part of cultural diversity in Turkey or speaking a different language. For example, in a thesis written before the Peace Process, the Kurds were defined as one of the non-Turkish groups:

BPP-2002-1/7: ...Some group members in Turkey define themselves differently and claim that they are subjected to discrimination in society... Based on Atatürk's statement "Turks are not the only ones living in Turkey; Circassians, Kurds, Lazes and Arabs live here as well," in the Grand National Assembly in 1920, [in this thesis, we] worked with these ethnic groups...

With the Peace Process, we can say that this ethnic framework to approach Turkish society has expanded to include the Turks into ethnic hierarchy. During this period, psychology theses start considering Kurdishness as an ethnic category like Turkishness and concentrating on self-report identity definitions rather than cultural and essentialist references. For example, in a thesis written during the Peace Process all ethnic groups are conceptualized through self-report identification:

DPP-2014-4/55: ...Firstly, 2 persons who did not specify their ethnic identity, 18 persons who identified their ethnic identity with an identity other than Turkish or Kurdish (for example, Arab, Circassian, human), 5 people who did not complete their scales and 14 persons who misunderstood manipulation were excluded from the analyses...

When all of the psychology theses and themes are considered, it would not be wrong to say that the Ethnocultural Minority theme, whose usage increased constantly after the Peace Process although it is not the most frequently used narrative, is an easily referred representation for historicizing the tension between the Turks and the Kurds and used in almost all sub-fields of psychology. On the other hand, it is important to remember that this trend of defining people by cultural and essentialist categories rather than their class and social positions is increasing with globalization (Bhatia, 2002; Gülerce, 2006) and has become mainstream tendency in international academia of psychology either (see, Verkuyten, 2007).

2.4. The Subordinate Group

In constructing the last narrative used to define Kurdishness, we have used the concept of subordinate group, which encompasses concepts mostly used in the literature on social identity. Because in this narrative, it is assumed that the tension as a result of the historical, social and political background creates a disadvantage for the Kurds by affecting their psychological processes. This narrative, that can be seen as a reflection of the ‘sociological’ oriented social psychology school that is also new for European and American social psychology, emphasizes the impact of social and political context on psychological processes (Hogg & Abrams, 1998; Tajfel & Turner, 1979). In this sense, Kurdishness is considered as *disadvantaged*, *despised* or a *subordinated* group. For example, in the following excerpt, it is claimed that Kurdishness has regressed to a disadvantaged position over time:

DPP-2015-17/15: ...Kurdish groups that contain this much diversity have started to come together as a disadvantageous group, based on speaking Kurdish or not being able to speak Turkish, and see themselves differently from the Turks...

Despite the fact that the scope of this narrative is quite limited when considering the entire dataset, its main difference from the other themes is that it builds the common identity content of the Kurds on a negative representation (Alparslan & Kuşdil, 2020). In other words, apart from being a numerical or cultural minority, the Kurds become subject to psychological research as a ‘marginalized’ group. Besides, this narrative has spread increasingly to the field and the theses after the Peace Process. Yet again, after the Peace Process, it seems that the terminological aspect of the issue, that is, the cognitive mechanism (i.e., the social categorization) corresponding to Kurdishness as a subordinate group has come to the forefront of conceptualization. For example, in a thesis written after the Peace Process, the social identity framework, as a cognitive representation of being a group, was used to indicate ethnic groups:

APP-2019-9/6: ...When looking at the intergroup contact process of the Turkish and the Kurdish social identity groups in Turkey, it is seen that the group members reside in certain neighbourhoods of the metropolises because of economic and cultural reasons and have less contact with each other...

Taking together, the Subordinate Group theme makes the Kurds a searchable subject due to the psychological burden created by Kurdishness, namely their negative identity. In this sense, it would not be wrong to say that Kurdishness continues to find itself a place in psychology studies through the subordinate group narrative that frames Kurdishness as a victimization experienced by the Kurds.

Conclusion

The scientific knowledge production and politics in Turkey have been intertwined with the modernization project since the foundation of the republic (Dölen, 2010). The academia, whose first representatives were largely bureaucratic intellectuals, still maintains its close relationship with the political authority (Arslan, 1999; Duman, 2018) and it is shaped by the pressure and purges of political authorities (Günel, 2013). This close relationship between the authority and the academia determines in which areas the universities can produce knowledge and which fields they can turn to; in short, this relationship determines the course of the academia. This situation also manifests itself in the scope of the studies on the Kurdish issue, one of Turkey's most fundamental problems (Scalbert-Yücel & Ray, 2006), and this can be clearly observed within our field of study, psychology. We are trying to describe and document this situation in psychology in recent years (Bayad et al., 2022; Bayad & Şen, 2023). In this study, we discussed how the Kurds were problematized and represented in psychology theses written on Kurds through the qualitative change over the last 20 years. Undoubtedly, for such a temporal comparison, the Peace Process was a good milestone, and we examined our dataset in three groups: before, during and after the Peace Process.

The first meta-theme we generated, “the Kurdish Issue”, corresponds to how the troubles which have turned into a knot of problems spreading to every domain of social life around the Kurds are defined and addressed, rather than directly addressing the Kurds. And just like in state discourse, differences emerge in problematizing the Kurdish issue in psychology theses (Yeğen, 2013). As we have shown before, along with the increase in the number of studies carried out (Bayad et al., 2022), we have revealed that there has been both positive and negative change in the language used and approach to the issue before, during and after the Peace Process. For example, we found that both the social and psychological destruction caused by the conflict and violence around the Kurdish issue and the parties to the conflict are discussed much more and more diversely during and after the Peace Process. Furthermore, we can say that the censorious language of the dominant paradigm prior the Peace Process has been eroded, the direct reference to the Kurds as an autonomous group has increased and their subjectification based on ethnocultural rights has normalized. On the other hand, while the *State Oppression / Tyranny* narrative, which is the most frequently used one when talking about the Kurdish issue, is mostly addressed through assimilation and denial during the Peace Process, with the end of the Peace Process however, the emphasis on state responsibility decreases and the Kurdish issue starts to be problematized and psychologized mostly within the context of Turkish-Kurdish relations. Likewise, although the Kurds gained a relatively significant visibility within psychology during the Peace Process, invisibility of the Kurds increases again with non-referencing (i.e., The Ignored) due to the increasing (auto)censorship after the termination of the Peace Process. Therefore,

along with the intervention of the political authority and the encouragement of the social atmosphere, the Kurds, whom the academia of psychology started to notice during the Peace Process, are once again not recognized after the termination of Peace Process. And even if they are noticed, they are mostly depicted through their victimizations.

All these findings can be evaluated as a clear indicator that the academia largely determines its direction in the shadow of nation-state politics. However, we can still say that the quantitative and qualitative change the Peace Process provided has exceeded certain boundaries in psychology both in defining the Kurds and in discussing the Kurdish issue; it determined both the autonomous existence of Kurds and the methods and possibilities of working with them in the field of psychology albeit based on just human-rights or victimization. Göregenli (2010) said that psychology would have to face the challenge with the Kurdish issue by confronting class backgrounds of psychologists, political authority in Turkey and an increased communication with civil society. Looking back after a decade, we can say that there has been an improvement both in the number and quality of academic studies with the provision of a positive political climate as in the case of the Peace Process. Yet, despite all this accumulation, scientific interest and attention is both temporary and limited in order to provide a real confrontation covering both personal and disciplinary self-reflection for the Kurds and Kurdish issue in the absence of mechanisms to protect researchers from (auto)censorship when the political climate changes again (see, Bhatia, 2018; Duncan et al., 2001).

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The limitation of clinical trauma discourse in socio-political contexts with regard to the Russian invasion of Ukraine and some considerations on the traumatization of children

Pia Andreatta & Gianluca Crepaldi

Abstract

The aim of the present paper is to examine trauma related issues raised by the current war in Ukraine, with a special focus on traumatization of children and young people brought about by forced migration and through experiencing conflict and war close up. Based on observations during several deployments and international operations (participatory observation), a further objective is to offer some reflections on the significance of trauma for integration and relationship development work conducted with children and young people who are refugees. Post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) will also be discussed and subjected to critical scrutiny, since it may not cover all the complex social, cultural and political dimensions of trauma. The authors explore alternatives to the present trauma discourse on the basis of the experiences and findings which have emerged from involvement with children and young people in areas afflicted by conflict and war but also according to relevant research literature. This paper arguments conclude that traumatising structures affecting refugees who have fled war and armed conflict may persist in host countries until such time as decision-making and areas of action that permit assumption of control and (co)determination are put in place.

Keywords

trauma, war, forced migration, PTSD, Ukraine

Background Information

The most recent reports of the UNHCR (2022a) speak of millions of people who are currently forced to migrate from their homes or have applied for asylum in another country. The global scale of flight and displacement caused by war,

violence and persecution reached its highest level ever recorded in the middle of 2021 and is reaching a new peak due to the war of aggression in Ukraine; the figures are continuously adjusted upwards. A total of 82.4 million people were forced to flee their homes. Among them are almost 26.4 million refugees under UNHCR mandate, about half of them are under 18 years of age. The trend continues to rise. In addition, at this point, about five weeks after the start of the war of aggression on Ukraine, more than 4 million people have already fled the country, the majority of them women and children. Approximately 6.5 million people are currently displaced within Ukraine and 13 million are in need of humanitarian assistance (UNHCR, 2022b). According to UNICEF, more than half of all children in Ukraine have already been displaced from their homes. 1.8 million of these children have fled to neighbouring countries (UNICEF, 2022).

The war has caused one of the fastest large-scale flight of children since World War II. This is a grim milestone that could have lasting consequences for generations to come. Children's safety, well-being, and access to vital services are threatened by the incessant horrific violence. (C. Russell, UNICEF Executive Director 2022)

Our society now faces the major task and challenge of integrating children and young people who have been forced to migrate, and such a process directly raises issues with regard to the traumatization they may have suffered. Before moving onto a consideration of the definition of trauma and some of its consequences, we would like to cast a glance at the contexts faced by children and young people in regions that are torn by war and strife.¹ Many societal structures suffer massive restrictions and collapse during times of war and conflict. When they are living within a context of strife, armed struggle and forced migration, children and young people are in many cases confronted with situations which are highly unusual and stressful. Such settings may also be traumatic. They experience acts of war, bombardment and persecution. They do not fail to notice that people disappear without trace. Expulsion and maltreatment are everyday occurrences in areas affected by war and conflict. It is not rare for children to be in a position where they witness violent death and injury at close hand. This gives rise to feelings of persecution, intimidation inflicted by repressive power structures, a sense of being uprooted, alienation, precariousness and loss of prospects. Adolescents are directly affected by all of this. Younger children tend to arrive at an indirect perspective of events via the way in which their environment or family members are impacted. Children will, for example, notice human rights abuses without having any specific socio-political understanding of what is occurring. They have no cognitive comprehension of the situation and cannot

¹ Besides the discussion of literature, the first author of this paper would also like to draw upon her own experiences of being stationed in conflict zones to provide psychosocial support to traumatised individuals and to use these to inform the present discussion. These deployments encompassed several months in Syria (Azaz, Aleppo Province) in 2013, one month in the summer of 2014 spent in the Gaza Strip during the last war (referred to by the Israeli armed forces as Operation Protective Edge), stays of several weeks in Lebanon in 2015 and a six-month stint in Sri Lanka in 2010 shortly after the civil war there. The case examples provided in this paper come from these deployments.

name it as such. People become brutalised in war settings. Often only a few months will elapse before threat gives way to massive anxiety, and aggression may also arise within families. Children's development is inevitably stunted. The fear felt by their parents instils rigidity, restriction and violence. An increasing propensity towards the use of force, particularly in the form of domestic and sexual assault, are common ramifications within the family, at least on the basis of what I have observed in the countries where I have been deployed. This is accompanied by a reduction in resources, in the ability to cope and in resilience. Neglect and lack of supplies are consequences of war and conflict. Malnutrition and hunger are specific shortages which may occur. These then pose an existential threat. The experiences in areas of armed conflict have taught that the dangerous scenarios which may occur are multifarious. Direct incidences of fighting, the use of firearms, bombardment from the air, threat of chemical or even nuclear weapons, kidnappings, torture, disappearances and omnipresent surveillance via constantly buzzing drones are all part of everyday life. Particularly tragic in war contexts was the observable decrease in bonding affinity, particularly on the part of mothers:

Case example 1: When I was serving alongside Médecins Sans Frontières, a one-year-old child with a life-threatening gunshot injury was brought in. Little Siad had been hit in the underbelly by a “stray” bullet whilst being carried on his father's arm. The surgical team set to work to try to save the child's life. My main focus, both immediately and in the coming weeks, was to provide support to the parents. Siad's mother was completely overwhelmed emotionally. She shouted, wept and screamed for hours before falling into a state of exhaustion, quite literally worn out by the struggle enveloping her child. Of course, such a catastrophic experience and such devastating fear left me doubting everything. The one thing I did not doubt was her strong maternal love. Ultimately, however, I was forced to come to the conclusion that this mother had not resumed her relationship with the child in the “passionate and loving” way I had expected. Renewed bonding did not take place after the five endless hours of the emergency operation, nor did it happen in the days and weeks thereafter. She remained distanced, almost apathetic. The result was that little Siad also did not thrive. In the final analysis, this mother seemed to me to have completely given up on her relationship with her child against the background of his severe injury.

The only interpretations we have been thus far been able to find with regard to this and other similar observations are as follows. (1) Willingness to forgo a bond with one's own child serves the purpose of providing protection against imminent separation through violent external influences. (2) The maternal “care function” is “damaged” by traumatization of the mother. In accordance with the concept propounded by psychoanalyst Masud Khan (1963), the mother then fails to be a “protective shield” for the child, that is subsequently exposed defenceless to inner and outer stimuli, which are too intense for the infantile psychic structure (Andreatta & Crepaldi, 2021). The consequence of this is a development of cumulative trauma [of the children], because the sense of security derived from the feeling of being able to protect the child has been deeply shattered or destroyed (Grubrich-Simitis, 1984).

The question of traumatization via confrontation with war and forced migration is frequently posed against the background of issues of how traumatization can be recognised, whether traumatised persons need different types of care to non-traumatised individuals, whether they exhibit more unpredictable modes of behaviour or whether they require particularly careful treatment. When we are dealing with children and young people who have undergone severe strain or traumatization, practice shows that we are frequently disconcerted and worry about making mistakes, about inflicting harm and additional suffering through an apparent lack of psychological training and, inversely, about overlooking their injuries and the damage done to them. Often emerges the concern that enquiries about the history they have experienced will lead to unintended re-traumatization or that failure to question a child will render any possible “catharsis” impossible (the ability finally to tell someone all about it). A series of implied assumptions often linger in the background: (1) Trauma represents a “category” that can be delimited. (2) An explicit difference should be made between psychological stresses experienced and actual traumas. (3) Traumas possibly happen in war and whilst a person is fleeing, but *no longer* occur in the country of arrival or country providing asylum. (4) Traumatization experienced cannot be processed until it is narrated. (5) People who have suffered may become “dangerous” for others. And, not least, all the worries mentioned help create a certain breeding ground for (positive or negative) stigmatisation. The discussion as to what trauma means is thus opened.

What does trauma mean? Alternative discourses on trauma

We should begin by emphasising that – even within clinical psychology – there is no unanimity amongst experts as to what trauma is, where it takes place and how its consequences should be treated. Numerous approaches with only a few matching points exist within various traditions. Sometimes, even fundamental issues may be contradictory (Becker, 2006), which leads us to a brief critical reflection on other relevant trauma discourses. In his book *The Politics of Trauma*, Brunner (2014) differentiates six discourse strands around trauma. There is a *public* and explicitly *political discourse*, which is primarily led by the state, governments or political parties, which addresses and regulates issues of victim/perpetrator and friend/foe via generated moral outrage and political activism. In this context it is set and defined who is seen as a victim of trauma. In a *collaborative discourse*, civil society actors draw attention to fates and demand solidarity. The third discourse is the reception of trauma within *popular science*, which is primarily based on media representations of post-traumatic disorders to strengthen the imagination about suffering (e.g., reportages, talk shows, media appearances of experts and “affected persons”). Moreover, there is a *legal discourse*, which decides who receives asylum (due to traumatization) or who is held accountable for injustice and how. *Empirical research* on trauma is a further discourse, in which it should be determined who is traumatized and who is not to produce valid epidemiological statements. Finally, Brunner mentions the

clinical-psychological or *psychiatric* discourse, which is very central for our discussion on PTSD, especially since the war in Vietnam. Against this background, the clinical-psychological aspect will be considered again in more detail in the following and an alternative model will be addressed.

Despite prefixing these remarks with the above relativisation, the intention is to explore what trauma could mean. In their psychodynamic approach Fischer and Riedesser (2009) define trauma as a

vital discrepancy experience between threatening situational factors and individual opportunities to overcome these, which is associated with feelings of helplessness and defenceless abandonment and thus brings about permanent breakdown in self-understanding and understanding of the world. (p. 84).

This definition contains a number of key elements for the definition of trauma. Subjective experience and objective facts and circumstances interlock, because trauma only encompasses the inner perspective of the individual. The inherent paradox of trauma (as defined by Fischer & Riedesser, 2009) is that no appropriate action can be taken to deal with situations which threaten a person's very existence. And this brings us to a common "core" of traumatization. A situation which can no longer be outrun via individual action options because of the existential threat it poses and from which no escape is possible leads to defenceless abandonment to the threat. This causes a person to experience total ineffectiveness and to undergo massive loss of control, anxiety and helplessness. These experiences are like *death suffered intrapsychically* (Becker 2006, p. 53), and Fischer & Riedesser (2009) describe them as the decisive pathogenetic moment of traumatization. This further leads to permanent breakdown of self-understanding and understanding of the world, a rupture within the self- and object-representations of the individual's psychic structure. The traumatic experience results in a conceptual collapse in both socio-cognitive and emotional structures. The subsequent (over)generalisation of this experience brings about a lasting breakdown in sensory and action reference points, in interpretation structures and in communicative reality principles – in short, a shaking of the trust in oneself, in the world and in the relationship between them (Janoff-Bulman, 2002; Andreatta, 2014). This leads to the complete disillusionment of the individual and to a survival or continued existence that is governed by prerequisites that have undergone full (psychological) change.

A fundamental distinction is drawn between type I and type II trauma (Terr, 1995), and this differentiation in itself points to very different manifestations of traumatization. One-time events such as accidents, the sudden death of a close friend or family member or natural disasters are designated as type I trauma. Apart from individual dissociative moments, it is usually possible to recall such incidences in detail. In psychological terms, type I traumas are most likely to leave behind the classic symptoms of acute or post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD). We will return to this condition later. By way of contrast, type II trauma is the result of complex and longer-term happenings. It thus comprises multiple or chronic traumatization. Examples of events triggering type II trauma are repeated abuse, neglect, serious chronic illness, violence in the family, war and

political violence, persecution and torture. Individual attempts to ward off such occurrences and personal coping strategies lead to deep-seated alterations to personality which are much too comprehensive to be mapped by a diagnosis of PTSD.

The central factor is, however, that situations and contexts exert a strong influence in terms of helping to determine whether events are of a traumatic nature. Let us take “death” as an explanatory example. Death is not traumatising *per se*. But the particular circumstances that arise within the context of war put things in a different light. Unlike in times of peace, death in war is violence. This violence is also witnessed by a child. It includes the targeted killing of individuals and a large overall number of injured or dead. It is *significant* whether the cause of death can be ascribed to “nature”, chance or the despotism of others (“collateral damage”). Suffering that has been caused and inflicted by humans (man-made disaster) shatters our trust, our self-understanding and our understanding of the world in a way which causes particularly serious consequences and brings about radical disillusionment. This disillusionment is accompanied by a feeling of defencelessness and vulnerability. A natural mourning process is also frequently not possible. This affects the (traumatic) experience, because a feeling of security is required in order to mourn and process events. Fear, menace, expulsion, persecution and forced (internal) displacement all stand in the way of mourning. There is no scope to shape positive experiences and joint rituals. A number of particular characteristics are also revealed in the case of children. A child’s concept of death passes through several stages of development from magical thinking to a more sophisticated understanding (Juen et al., 2015). Confrontation with war violently breaches the magical component of a child’s thoughts.

There is something else to add to the debate surrounding trauma. Criticism needs to be levelled at the fact that current trauma discourse is predominantly led by clinical and medical considerations. This means that the discussion of symptoms following a trauma is also faulty. The first result of this is an inadmissible conclusion regarding the traumatization of persons. The frequent presumption is that those who are traumatised should display certain clinical symptoms. By the same token, persons not exhibiting these symptoms are not traumatised (cf. DSM-5; APA, 2013, a manual which applies internationally). Secondly, the predominant trauma discourse also ignores both the aetiology and the socio-political context of traumatization. However, when we speak of traumatization, the latter should be just as much an object of focus as *trauma symptoms*. Things which happen take place in a specific political context. Becker sets this out in the following terms: “*Individual pain [...] is first of all part of a societal process. The core of traumatization is always social, [...] and to this extent the traumatization suffered forms part of a specific societal context*” (Becker, 2009; p. 67). The implication is that dealing with the crimes committed is more crucial for processing and for the perspective of victims than the degree of severity of traumatization (Becker 2009, Stamm & Friedman 2000). This also makes it clear that traumas are not events which are easy to delineate. The time at which they occur can also not be determined, as is suggested by the formulation

post-traumatic stress disorder. In this respect a theory of trauma, especially in the context of war, must consider the intertwining of subjective (psychological) factors with an "objective" social, cultural and political reality. To do justice to this, Brunner (2021) refers to the so-called *spatial turn* to complement a critical theory of trauma, that takes into account the specific *place* and geopolitical context where traumatization occurs.

The model of sequential traumatization (Keilson, 1979; as developed further by David Becker) should be presented as one alternative to the clinical trauma discourse. This model relates to the impact of traumas caused by social policy and reveals that traumatization is multi layered. Several interrelated sequences are described. (1) Indications of pre-traumatic conditions are already in place prior to the beginning of the traumatic process. Development of tension and poverty increasingly leads to anxiety, dejection, concern and worry. Even at this stage, children and young people are directly or indirectly adversely affected too, for example via their parents. These traumatic preconditions have been evident for years throughout the whole Ukraine, without any expectation of the recent invasion (annexation of Crimea as well as the events around Donetsk and Luhansk/Lugansk back in 2014). (2) The beginning of persecution then takes place. The conflict continues to escalate. This sequence started on February 24, 2022, with the attack of the Russian Federation against the sovereign neighboring state of Ukraine. So-called orientation trauma (Fischer & Riedesser, 2009) may arise in children and young people, resulting in the confusion of communicative categories. Parents justifiably develop traits such as anxiety and behave in a much more authoritarian manner towards children and young people. In a further sequence (3), acute persecution and direct terror come to the fore. These contain the existential traumatic experience that occurs in the wake of undergoing or witnessing arrest, torture and murder. This sequence is also characterized by internal displacement, forced migration within their own country and accommodation in camps. The (psychological) sequences (2) and (3) almost coincide in the current war of aggression. The moment of traumatic collapse is difficult to identify. Chronification (4) is a common further development of this sequence. Phases of waiting thus occur amidst acute persecution, and this is where the terror unfurls its full psychological effect. The unfolding of the shock over the rapid developments in the attack on Ukraine, are at this stage already becoming visible. Due to siege, encirclement, repeated shelling, as well as great restrictions and threat of death, many Ukrainian citizens are forced to hold for several weeks in unheated basements or bunkers, in uncertainty about the immediate and further future. We also observe this phase when troops withdraw from combat zones. In these moments, the catastrophe of the battlefield comes fully to light. Such phases would also exist in the case of a negotiated ceasefire. (5) Periods of transition and initial future considerations or further upheavals may set in. Decision-making phases leading to personal crises are a predominant feature of this period. Uncertainties and insecurities unleash their own traumatic effect. Although the sequence at the end of a war (6) means that acute threat no longer exists, it does not spell the end of the traumatic process to the extent that a

ceasefire does not yet produce peace and security. The people affected in Ukraine have not yet arrived there, but thousands of them are on the run.

The decision to flee and the fact of forced migration can be developed into further separate sequences. Forced migration in itself contains inherent traumatic potential because of the lack of alternatives. The sequences initiated by forced displacement are revealed to be (1) stress factors before and during migration, (2) stress factors in the host country and (3) stress factors caused by the chronification of the provisional nature of events. Let us look at this in greater detail. In the period prior to forced migration, individual experience contradictory emotions in the form of despair and hope, an absence of alternatives, a sense of giving up and acceptance of flight as the only way out and the wish to save themselves (Becker 2006, p. 193). Specific reasons why children and young people may need to migrate include loss of one or both parents, forced labour, a forced marriage, impending conscription as a child soldier, modern slavery involving children for the purpose of sexual exploitation and demands made by families for economic assets to be produced. Assumption of responsibility which is not appropriate to age and stage of development is characteristic. In the case of unaccompanied minors in particular, migration may often take weeks and months and involve exposure to (life)threatening conditions. Children and young people may easily become victims of violence during the migration process. Stress factors in the host country include uncertainty about the present and the future, acculturation pressure and stigmatisation (positive and negative discrimination). Children and young people may also develop emotions connected with reactions to mourning and trauma such as flashbacks, nightmares, feelings of alienation and guilt and a sense of incompetence that arises from unsuccessful attempts to make themselves understood. One unaccompanied minor stated: *"We are all turning into stones here"* (Kusturica, 2009). This gives powerful expression to the chronification of the provisional nature of the situation. Despite the shock of losing everything, they still need to summon up the strength needed to pursue an objective. Adaptation, integration, the retention of cultural identity whilst assuming a new one all throw up huge and multifarious challenges for the young generation. Children become key intermediary persons between cultures and act as cultural bridge builders.

Our argumentation of what trauma means has thus come full circle. To reiterate, trauma means loss of the ability to influence an existentially threatening situation via one's own actions. It also means powerlessness, helplessness and defencelessness – in other words, loss of control by an individual and thus a permanent breakdown of self-understanding and of understanding of the world. "Turning into stone", as the above quotation makes clear, also means that a person will remain in this state. In many cases, refugees identify with precisely this socially determined lack of influence, non-participation and helplessness which has already been the origin of traumatization. No assumption can therefore be made that the psychological trauma effect has come to an end. Keilson (1979) even emphasises that the time *after* the end of war can be designated as the most intrusive and painful period and that people frequently become caught in this

sequence. The enormity of what has been inflicted on children and young people often does not become apparent until much later.²

Consequences of the traumatization of children and young people

Psychotraumatology never tires of emphasising that the consequences of trauma are normal reactions rather than pathological reactions in the face of extreme situations. For this reason, the term psychological *reaction* is often preferred to the notion of *disorder*. Equally, however, psychotraumatology also never tires of predominantly summarising the consequences of traumatization via the formulation of post-traumatic stress disorder and then offering international comparisons. This is a matter of regret for some researchers and practitioners (Becker, 2006; Argenti-Pillen, 2000), and we share this view, that the PTSD as “the great equalizer” is a questionable western standard, that is at times ignorant towards other cultural expressions and political circumstances. Post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) was mainly developed on the basis of consequences of trauma suffered by Vietnam veterans. It entered the diagnostic and statistical manuals for the classification of psychological disorders in 1984, the relevant manual at the time being DSM-III. The current issue (DSM-5; APA, 2013) has been expanded to include a diagnosis version for children. PTSD encompasses three groups of symptoms. (1) *Intrusion* – recurring forceful memories and dreams, sudden actions as if the event is returning, i.e., trauma-related emotions with recognisable content. Recreating events via play, nightmares including without specific content and post-traumatic play are particular symptoms amongst children. (2) The group of *avoidance symptoms* encompasses circumvention of thoughts or feelings which are associated with the event. After a car accident, for example, an attempt is made to make a detour around the place where the accident took place. Perhaps a decision to give up driving is even taken. Feelings, conversations and memories are suppressed. This process is linked with a lessening of interests, of body awareness and of emotions and is also accompanied by feelings of alienation. In the case of children, we see a flattening of general responsiveness, social withdrawal, regression, a feeling of boredom and emptiness and restricted ability to play. A switch between phases (1) and (2) is a normal part of working through and processing traumatization. These phases are also designated as the bi-phasal course of trauma reaction (Fischer & Riedesser, 2009). Group (3) includes *overexcitation*, i.e., excessive responses to stress, irritability, outbursts of fury, sleep disturbances, concentration difficulties and exaggerated startled reactions. Symptoms described for children are nocturnal awakening, fear of going to bed, disobedience and aggressiveness, extreme and rapid mood swings, provocation

² This is something which the first author can confirm from her experience of deployment in areas of conflict: Many months after the ceasefire in Sri Lanka, during a period in which the population had a growing confidence that the armistice would hold, traumatising events and the individual traumatising stories individuals had experienced gradually began to emerge under a wave of emotional pain. The severe stresses were revealed accordingly. Witnessing all of this is appalling, even if one only hears people talk about events in the common room of a refugee shelter somewhere (Andreatta, 2012).

of corporal punishment and infliction of pain. These reactions or symptoms must occur to a certain extent and above all need still to be present four weeks after the trauma in order for the disorder to be diagnosed as such (APA, 2013). The subtype of PTSD for children aged up to six was described in terms of behaviour in order to take account of a child's capacity for verbal expression. Since the introduction of DSM-5 in 2013, rates of PTSD amongst children are now between three and eight times higher compared to the previous DSM-IV version. We mention this so that, alongside the criticism of PTSD, the meaningfulness of the statistical rates is not overestimated.

Klingman (2002) collates a large number of studies focusing on children and young people *in* the conflict regions. He states that the dispersion of PTSD rates of children and young people is between 8% and 75%. Supplementary mention will now be made of a number of studies into PTSD in the conflict regions. In an investigation into 197 children aged between 6 and 11 in the Gaza Strip, Thabet et al. (2008) arrive at a PTSD rate of up to 70% of the children. The Lebanese War Studies investigated 25 schools three weeks after the ceasefire and indicated a PTSD rate of 24% amongst those aged from 6 to 19 (Itani et al., 2014). In Israel, PTSD was identified in 19% of children aged between 5 and 10 following a rocket attack. In our view, this makes it clear why these figures are able to provide us with so little guidance. The dispersion rate is scarcely lower in the case of studies conducted *in the host country* with refugees who are unaccompanied minors. In a study carried out in England in 2008, Hodes and his colleagues found a PTSD rate of 61.5%. An investigation in Belgium into 166 unaccompanied minors revealed PTSD in 37% to 47% of cases. 40% of unaccompanied minors in the Netherlands display PTSD one year after arrival in the country as a refugee. After two years, the same group even exhibits an increase compared to the previous year as the rate rises to 41% (Smid et al., 2011). A study carried out in Vienna arrived at a PTSD rate of 17% of unaccompanied minors (Völkl-Kernstock et al., 2011).

More complex study designs and long-term investigations remain absent in many instances. We also regret the fact that the way in which PTSD is diagnosed clearly draws no distinction between ongoing conditions of war and incidents such as a dog bite. The diagnosis of PTSD drawn up after accidents is just the same as that prepared after years of traumatization through war. This fact alone renders it useless (Becker, 2009; Eissler, 1984). The range of traumatic situational experiences is ultimately large, meaning that a standardised trauma syndrome can scarcely be expected (Fischer & Riedesser, 2009). A sequential interpersonal traumatization cannot fundamentally be mapped in a PTSD diagnosis. Also, the traumatic consequences at a symptom level are sometimes not revealed until a latency period of months or years has passed (late-onset PTSD). In the case of children and young people, consideration further needs to be accorded to transgenerational traumatization, i.e., transmission processes via parents and caregivers as a result of the structure of the relationship with the parents or identification of the children with parents. This would not be mapped in a PTSD diagnosis either.

At this point, we would like to introduce a number of observations from war regions. We first present a clinical recording of symptoms of individuals brought to the psychological care centre in A'zāz (Syria), which was carried out by the first author of the present paper between August and October 2013. We will select a statistical observation period of 14 days in August 2013. The objective criteria of war traumatization, namely direct threat to life, were present in all new persons awaiting consultation or diagnosis (N = 60, of whom 31 were male, 27 female, 2 unknown). And yet, despite all the symptoms which could be found, only four persons showed signs of PTSD. The others were by no means symptom-free. They mainly displayed a clinical picture of depression (20%), followed by severe anxiety disorders (17%) and psychosomatic consequences. Their stages of their disorders were too extensive to be covered by a PTSD diagnosis. The following observation should illustrate the problem.

Case example 2: The mother of a 7-year-old Syrian child brought him to the clinic stating that he had been suffering from epilepsy for several weeks. She described that he would suddenly become unresponsive before lapsing into unconsciousness and falling over. No further information was obtainable, and in any case, it would not have been possible to carry out the necessary medical investigations at this particular clinic, which only has basic minimum equipment. I played with the child on the floor together with the Arab-English interpreter using the few utensils which were available. Surprisingly, the game began to incorporate elements which I believed to indicate trauma. Intrusive moments were revealed. I then asked the boy about his attacks. He said that he did not lose consciousness, as his mother had described. He would always hear something from outside, just like the time when – to put it in his own words – the aeroplanes came over and hit his village and the house of his relatives. There was blood, and it was very loud. Whenever he heard the rumble of machines coming closer, he went on to say, he would be like a stone (numbing) and would then probably fall over (dissociation). In my opinion, this described a traumatic emergency reaction rather than epilepsy. This cannot be treated in the midst of war. All that remained to be done, at least this was my approach, was to prepare for an emergency. We practised how to behave in an emergency. He returned after the next two air raids. His mother reported that the attacks had ceased. He had talked about how he had behaved and related that he had taken his sister and the toys they shared into his hiding place.

The consequences of the stresses experienced by children and young people who come to us from regions of war and conflict are revealed in a wide variety of ways. Relevant clues are exhibited in the children's behaviour and in particular by the way they experience things. They show difficulties in concentrating and sometimes display so-called dissociation or states in which the feeling of the traumatic threat returns. Overtiredness because of sleep disturbance and nightmares may occur. Small children react more irritably. School children react by displaying various regressive behaviour such as clinginess or anxieties including fear of the dark and fear of being abandoned. Experiences are often repetitively re-enacted. Sometimes children and young people suffer panic attacks or react with significant terror to aspects such as objects in the air (large

helicopters or nearby aircraft) and sensory fragments such as a bang. They will occasionally show mood swings and aggressiveness against themselves. Younger children may engage in war games with a high degree of violence. Difficulties with peers or loss of self-empathy and empathy for others might also occur. Other traits to mention are depressiveness, thoughts of suicide and feelings of guilt extending as far as psychotic symptoms. Consequences for children and young people are revealed in the area of identity and in self-understanding and understanding of the world. Negative expectations regarding the future are frequently prevalent amongst unaccompanied minors. A low level of interest in everyday life and a lack of enthusiasm are conspicuous aspects here. Depending on their underlying behavioural style, young people may tend to become extroverted or introverted (e.g., withdrawal, “emotional silence”). At a physical level, psychosomatic disorders are often displayed instead of open symptoms of fear.

Concluding remarks on dealing with trauma and the idea of resilience

The first thing to be said is that, when we confront trauma, we will have to accept achieving a much more modest understanding of traumatic relationships and developing action alternatives accordingly (Becker, 2006). We wish to emphasise a statement made by Van der Hart in an interview with Huber:

I believe that the core of every traumatization lies in extreme loneliness, in a sense of being totally abandoned. This means that traumatization of relationships and of the ability to form relationships is frequently involved. In the event of a violent trauma, this is always the case. A loving relationship, which in some regards simply offers security, will be indispensable in order to be able to recover from a trauma at all (Huber, 2007; p. 61).

In our view, these relationship aspects also include “virtues” such as recognition of injustice suffered and attestation of pain that has been afflicted. One thing which affords us a certain scope to exert a positive influence on the situation faced by children and young people and which represents a positive piece of news to the extent that we feel able to grasp the point – to highlight this one more time – is that dealing with traumatization and the crimes is often more significant for processing and for the health prospects of the victim than the degree of severity of the traumatization (Becker, 2009; Stamm & Friedman, 2000). What opportunities are then available to us from a social, pedagogical and psychological perspective?

After the stress of forced migration and trauma, the initial focus is best placed on imparting security and the possibility of recovery. Trauma and stress reactions often fundamentally overlay the mourning process to begin with, and organisation of life in the host country is also paramount. This means that traumatic stress is not a signal for reappraisal within the context of confronting the trauma. It is a signal – and here we are consciously repeating ourselves – to provide security and a safe setting to the extent that these are available and to

facilitate a sense of perspective and recovery. With regard to the fundamental attitude underlying an attempt to exert a positive influence, we should remark that chronification of the provisional nature of the situation and insecurities in the host country are (re)traumatising to the extent that they once again impact directly on the core of traumatization that has now been outlined several times. This is the impossibility that individuals can change themselves via their own actions, which in turn leads to helplessness, abandonment and ultimately to loss of controllability. The traumatically shaken self-understanding and understanding of the world thus remains intact in its generalised form. The catastrophising perspective which originates from real experiences rather than from the fantasy of the individual (this signifies the paradigmatic shift from neurosis to trauma) is often contrasted with ideas of hope and healing which are often virtually irrational – within the context of endeavours to compensate for the trauma (cf. Fischer & Riedesser, 2009) – as protection against further damage. This is sometimes reflected in the fact that “new arrivals” are full of gratitude. They emphasise how well things are going for them here. Or unaccompanied minors gain new hope that things can only get better.

As far as supporting children is concerned, it is important to stress that cognitive development is crucial. Children and young people endeavour to find explanations. They blame themselves or undertake childish rescue attempts. Addressing new questions at every stage of development is part of this process (Juen et al., 2015). Children also have limited abilities to tolerate emotional pain and negative emotions (for a long period of time). The painful process of mourning is thus regulated via distraction and play. They have limited abilities to verbalise their feelings and mourn discontinuously. With regard to support, this means that everyday routines in particular are able to provide children with initial security. Children pay close attention to the way in which their (new) environment and adults react to a traumatic experience, and these thus exert a significant influence. Some young people, and adults too, speak about their experiences. If the cathartic effect of relating a trauma is to be successful in the first place, then this will not happen until an individual finds the right conditions, i.e., an everyday life and relationships that are sustainable enough to allow “speaking about it” to take place. In this case, an attitude of empathic listening, a recognition of what has happened and the recognition and expression of a person’s own helplessness which listening can trigger helps to form a significantly more favourable interpersonal stance than that created by “evidence-based therapeutic tricks”. The actual traumatic stories frequently remain guarded until sufficient “growth” has taken place to enable the individuals themselves to stand up to the effect of the traumatic memory in the present time.

The encouragement of resilience is a popular approach at the moment and requires

measures aimed at achieving stabilisation and the regaining of self-confidence, individual processing of development tasks, support in coping with everyday routine and everyday life, the fostering of resources and areas of potential and clarification of the treatment required (Zito & Brandmaier, 2010; p. 165).

Focus on resilience means orientation towards needs instead of concentrating on trauma symptoms, and internal and external places of safety have a key part to play in this. The main elements encompass a focus on (1) connections. Stability and guidance may be provided by self-esteem and social relationships and in particular by places of shared social experience. Some progress can therefore be made in terms of countering feelings of alienation and a broken sense of identity. (2) Children need stable environments in order to allow recovery to occur. Stabilisation via everyday routines, participation and structure, such as transparency, regularity, a clear overview and involvement in planning processes, and the facilitating of action and action decisions are all key. Encouragement to express feelings via media may be offered. For children, creative expression takes precedence over verbal methods. The former include painting pictures, games, writing, group activities, theatre, music etc. They do not regain their strength via confrontational questioning. The Cologne Treatment Centre for Torture Victims and Refugee Counselling is carrying out a project to foster resilience amongst migrant children. The four main levels on which this work is being pursued are the creation of lasting ties, education, and awareness of self-efficacy and building blocks of good memories (Irmeler, 2011). The return of decision-making and action areas to enable (co-)determination are thus crucial to the ending of ongoing traumatising structures.

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“Let brothers not fight!”: Youth work and nationalist ideologies among young migrants in Europe

Sertan Batur

Abstract

Right-wing parties and ideologies are gaining more and more importance in European societies. Racist ideologies are functional on the one hand to regulate the labor market and social services, on the other hand to mobilize the masses for neoliberal transformations. People in the European migration, as victims of racist ideologies, develop different ways of dealing with discrimination in the absence of strong anti-fascist political structures. A current phenomenon among young migrants is a “long-distance nationalism” through which they construe themselves in the position of power in a distant country, while staying away from mainstream politics in the country where they live. This discusses this issue using an example from Vienna. In 2020, Turkish nationalists attacked a Kurdish rally in Favoriten, a working-class district of Vienna. For three days, there was an extraordinary state of affairs in the district with heavy police deployment. We, as a group of youth workers, developed a film project on the subject together with young people who were involved in the clashes in various forms. This example shows how youth social work can reflect together with young people on their reasons for acting and bring about a change in stereotypical actions. The article concludes by explaining some important working principles in (psycho-) social work with young people who tend towards right-wing ideologies.

Keywords

racism, right-wing ideologies among migrants, youth social work

In June 2020, a Kurdish information booth in Favoriten, the 10th district of Vienna, fell victim to an attack orchestrated by Turkish nationalists. The booth, originally set up as a protest against violence against women, sought to highlight the plight of Kurdish activists and female freedom fighters who had lost their lives at the hands of the Turkish military forces. Adorned with numerous Kurdish symbols, the booth was perceived by Turkish nationalists as a platform for the Kurdistan Workers’ Party (PKK), the Kurdish guerrilla organization engaged in conflict with the Turkish state.

As the organizers sought refuge within the premises of a left-wing association in the previously occupied Ernst Kirchweyer House (EKH), a swarm of attackers swiftly converged on the EKH, where windows were shattered, and attempts were made to set the building ablaze. The following day witnessed a demonstration against the assaults on both the information booth and the EKH, organized by anti-fascists and Kurdish activists. Regrettably, this demonstration also became a target for aggression by Turkish nationalists, resulting in several arrests, vehicular destruction, and widespread criticism directed at the police during three days of tumultuous demonstrations, counter-demonstrations, and law enforcement operations (“Erneut Angriff Grauer Wölfe,” 2020). The majority of the assailants were male adolescents and young adults who were either not born in Austria or had parents born outside the country. However, their ethnic backgrounds were not exclusively Turkish; among them were individuals identifying as Afghan, Arab, Chechen, Albanian, or even Kurdish.

These incidents spurred a media and political discourse in Austria on the integration of “migrants” into Austrian society. The Turkish Federation in Austria, supported by the Nationalist Movement Party (MHP) – the prominent fascist party in Turkey – distanced itself from the attack on its Facebook page, urging its members to adhere to Austrian laws. Nevertheless, Austrian media and politicians attributed the assault to the Grey Wolves, the militant wing of the MHP, which was notorious for targeting leftist activists and intellectuals during the 1970s and, in recent decades, for participating in attacks against Kurdish activists. Notably, some participants in the attacks were unequivocally aligned with the Grey Wolves or their symbols, as evidenced by the display of Turkish flags, the “wolf salute,” which has been banned in Austria since the right-wing ÖVP-FPÖ coalition, and the chanting of “Allahu akbar.”

Central to the discussion was the speculation about potential direct influence from Turkey (Scherndl, 2020), where the MHP holds a key position in the government while the primary partner, Erdogan’s Justice and Development Party (AKP), progressively integrates Turkish nationalism into its political agenda. It is a well-established fact that some members of Turkish ruling parties or high-ranking Turkish bureaucrats maintain ties with far-right and criminal organizations in Europe, such as *Osmanen Germania* (Fischhaber & Klasen, 2018). These groups are utilized to intimidate dissenting intellectuals or journalists (“Türkischer Journalist Erk Acarer,” 2021) and function as agents of the Turkish “deep state” within the Turkish and Kurdish diaspora in Europe.

However, these connections do not fully elucidate why nationalist ideology exerts such a profound influence in the diaspora or how hundreds of young people aged 13-21 can mobilize rapidly through social networks in a European capital. Presenting these young individuals as part of a tightly organized fascist organization under Turkey’s control oversimplifies the issue, obscuring the fact that we are grappling not only with a political matter, but also a social one.

Nationalism and nationalist ideologies are prevalent themes in youth work within German-speaking countries. Right-wing parties find substantial support among young people who do not identify as “migrants,” while many young individuals with “migration background” place significant emphasis on their

national identity, often describing themselves as “proud Turks,” “proud Albanians,” “proud Serbs,” and so forth on Instagram.

In this article, my focus will be on young people with a “migration background” who strongly emphasize their national identity. To commence, I will delve into the link between racism in the neoliberal age and tangible power dynamics in society. This connection between racism and actual social relations leads me to posit a crucial distinction between nationalist and racist ideologies among members of privileged and diasporic groups. These phenomena are not synonymous, and likewise, nationalist and racist political attitudes exhibit distinct dynamics and functions within the diaspora and in positions of privilege within power relations. Therefore, I contend that nationalist and racist political attitudes in the diaspora merit separate consideration, to be understood solely in the context of the prevailing social conditions in each country. It is therefore misleading and reductionist to equate nationalism in privileged groups with nationalism in the diasporic group, and similarly, nationalism in the diasporic group with nationalism in the so-called “homeland.” To elucidate this phenomenon, I will draw upon Benedict Anderson’s concept of “long-distance nationalism” (Anderson 1998, pp. 58).

Following this theoretical foundation, the second part of this article will showcase the video project “Let brothers not fight!” from Vienna. This project involved collaboration with young individuals exhibiting Turkish nationalist tendencies, some of whom actively participated in the 2020 riots in Vienna’s 10th district, while others were keenly interested, but refrained from direct involvement for various reasons. This project served as a unique opportunity for these young individuals to articulate and elucidate their motivations, especially at a time when politicians and the media were extensively discussing the youth demonstrators. Based on this project, I identify three functions of nationalist ideologies within diasporic youth groups and discuss fundamental pedagogical stances in critical psychology-oriented work with nationalist youth in the diaspora. In the final section of the article, I will offer reflections on the intersection of social work with racist or nationalist ideologies, particularly within the context of a racist social system.

A terminological explanation

In delving into the term “diaspora” throughout this article, I am cognizant of its religious undertones, particularly its historical association with the Jewish diaspora. Within the realm of migration studies, however, the term has evolved to encompass a broader significance. William Safran (1991, pp. 5) outlines six shared characteristics among diasporic groups:

- 1) they, or their ancestors, have been dispersed from a specific original ‘center’ to two or more ‘peripheral,’ or foreign, regions; 2) they retain a collective memory, vision, or myth about their original homeland—its physical location, history, and achievements; 3) they believe that they are not—and perhaps cannot be—fully accepted by their host society and therefore feel partly alienated and insulated from it; 4) they regard their ancestral homeland as their true, ideal home and as

the place to which they or their descendants would (or should) eventually return—when conditions are appropriate; 5) they believe that they should, collectively, be committed to the maintenance or restoration of their original homeland and to its safety and prosperity; and 6) they continue to relate, personally or vicariously, to that homeland in one way or another, and their ethnocommunal consciousness and solidarity are importantly defined by the existence of such a relationship.

Using this definition, Safran speaks of the Armenian, Maghrebian, Turkish, Palestinian, Cuban, Greek, and Chinese diasporas of the present, and the Polish diaspora of the past, although none of them quite fit the “ideal type” of Jewish diaspora (Safran, 1991, p. 6). Robin Cohen (2008, p. 6) also embraces this list with slight adjustments.

Given that my article centers on young people originating from Turkey and other predominantly Muslim-populated countries, Safran’s identified commonalities prove particularly useful, because, as Safran also emphasizes, these shared characteristics can be easily recognized among a large part of guest workers from Turkey and their children. However, it is crucial to acknowledge the potential criticism of differentiating between young individuals labeled as “migrants” and those deemed “non-migrants,” as this may inadvertently reinforce a racist dichotomy. Many of these young people were born in Austria (or Germany) or have grown up there, with a significant number holding Austrian citizenship. Labeling them as “foreigners” or part of a diaspora group may be deemed racist, implying that their true home lies elsewhere.

As I will elaborate further, this distinction is rooted in the legal and racist interventions of the nation-state in society. Yet, we must recognize the colonialist conditions within European metropolises as an undeniable reality. While certain groups are subjected to being “migrantified” by the nation-state, their relationship with privileged groups becomes a dual and inherently contradictory post-racist exclusion. On one hand, there is a fervent desire for equal rights with Austrians/Germans/Europeans. On the other hand, being identified with these privileged groups is perceived as an affront. The bolstering of identification with an imaginary and many times idealized “homeland” and groups originating from this “homeland” or similar places stems from the aspiration to differentiate from the “selfish,” “racist,” and “snooty” colonialists. Identifying as Austrian or German is only considered in terms of equality and directed towards the privileged groups. Conversely, aligning with the group of colonialist Europeans or resembling “them” is regarded as shameful. This is precisely why the term “diaspora group” aptly characterizes these groups. This distinction is not merely externally imposed by privileged groups or the nation-state; it is also internalized by groups excluded from social resources due to the prevailing racist and colonialist circumstances, serving the purposes of cohesion and resistance.

Institutionalization of racism by the nation-state

As highlighted earlier, the efficacy of racist discourse is contingent upon the intervention of the modern nation-state, which furnishes it with a tangible

political and legal foundation. Étienne Balibar contends that, without this state intervention that links specific rights to citizenship, all national or pseudo-national minorities would remain virtual and lack legal substance (Balibar 1992, pp. 18).

The political strategy inherent in racist discourse typically seeks to regulate, on one hand, those engaged in the most unwanted jobs for meager wages (Wallerstein 1990, pp. 45) and, on the other hand, those entitled to social benefits, welfare institutions, housing, or political participation (Miles 1990, pp. 172). In the context of the neoliberal order's persistent demand for cheap labor, the objective of racist discourse is not the outright termination of ties with individuals labeled as "foreign," but rather their subordination to the interests of the so-called "majority society" (Osterkamp 1991). This hierarchization of interests masks class differences and oppression mechanisms between the exploiters and the segment of the exploited that gains privileges by racist policies. It constructs an ideological unity between the two and simultaneously minimizes production costs, since workers lacking solidarity are less likely to develop a common strategy (Wallerstein 1990, p. 44; Holzkamp 1995, p. 24f).

The state, in principle, delineates a "we group" enjoying full civil rights and an "outside group" granted some of these rights only under specific conditions. Those who acquiesce to this arrangement, requiring at least compliant behavior, implicitly endorse a general deprivation of rights, deeming it legitimate for society as a whole that certain rights must be earned initially; and that all those who do not (cannot) fulfill the requirements of neo-liberal capitalism will also eventually lose these rights –regardless of their civic status (cf. Osterkamp 1987, pp. 140). The latent threat of privilege loss faced by the holders reinforces identification with the "we" group and fosters approval of measures against subordinate groups, inspiring ideologies that adopt an essentialist view of the "otherness" of constructed social groups.

This institutionalization of racism by the state stands in stark contrast to the foundational principle of the modern democratic state, which, at least in theory, guarantees the equality of all. According to Robert Miles (2000), institutionalized racism either evolves from a racist discourse but is no longer justified by it, or it represents a modified racist discourse that retains its original intention but has changed its form (p. 27). Even if no law or regulation explicitly justifies racism, they remain within the framework of racist discourse, not only reinforcing the inequality of legally defined groups, but virtually rendering it self-evident. Laws, regulations, and clauses across various legal domains ensure that the "foreign" group remains largely excluded from democratic processes, citizenship is subject to intricate and inequality-generating conditions, housing allocation and receipt of social benefits are tied to challenging conditions, professional competencies are not recognized, and regulations restricting personal rights (such as the ban on headscarves in public institutions) are implemented, among other examples (Bühl 2016, pp. 213).

Institutional racism is rooted in the structural consolidation of inequality. Irrespective of the intentions of individuals within state or societal institutions, these entities (re)produce racist discourses and discrimination through

bureaucratic processes and institutional logic. Access restrictions in the education sector, labor and housing market disparities, discrimination in the healthcare system, and instances of prejudiced and racist profiling by the judiciary and police are grounded in these structural realities (Bühl 2016, pp. 227). The media play a pivotal role in disseminating racist discourses, wielding substantial influence on public sentiment through racist language and reporting. This influence extends to other social and state institutions, perpetuating racist discourses within everyday communication.

New configuration of racism in the neoliberal era

To comprehend the nationalist inclinations within diaspora groups, it is imperative to scrutinize racism and discriminatory social relations within the contemporary European framework, elucidating the role played by (proto-)fascist European parties. Racism, historically fashioned as both an ideology and a tool for legitimizing prevailing power structures, is intricately linked to historical conditions. The choice of which group becomes the target of racist exclusion, the underlying purpose, and the defining characteristics of a “race” or “ethnicity” are outcomes of historical determinants (Miles 2000, p. 27). Despite historical continuities, understanding racist relations necessitates an examination within specific historical and social contexts. Analyzing economic conditions, political strategies, and ideological elements that underpin the racism in question is crucial (Müller 2017, p. 106). The term racism gains its concrete meaning in its plural form, comprehensible only within its historical context (cf. Hall 2000, p. 11). Contemporary racism does not replicate what was produced by eighteenth and nineteenth-century “race” theorists; instead, it (re)constructs itself according to the needs of *today’s* neoliberal capitalism, occasionally revisiting and reproducing racist schemata from past centuries.

While acknowledging the historical continuities within racist ideologies, it is essential to recognize that any specific instance of racism is an outcome shaped by the reworking of certain elements from the past and the introduction of novel components (Miles 2000, p. 27). The composition of this configuration, the amalgamation of both historical and contemporary elements into a unified entity, is contingent upon prevailing concerns within specific historical social relations. Étienne Balibar (1992) posits that a new configuration of racism relies on pre-existing schemas of collective memory intertwined with a society’s institutional and cultural history. Balibar identifies colonialism and anti-Semitism as the primary schemas of racism in the European context, serving as the foundation for newer forms like anti-Muslim racism. Activation of these schemas hinges upon a social structure of discrimination economically functional and embedded in the state’s organization. In twentieth-century Europe, this structure was given by the hierarchy of qualifications between “native” and “foreign” workers who were brought from the periphery to the centers. The essential moment for this new configuration of racism, according to Balibar, arises during an institutional constellation of crisis, disrupting the relationship *of* the state to its ideological

foundations and individuals' identity-forming relationship *to* the state (Balibar 1992, pp. 18).

In contemporary Western Europe's post-Fordist, neoliberal transformation, a crisis-induced institutional constellation plays a pivotal role. Globalization and advanced production technology lead to downsizing in the industrial sector, diminishing the demand for traditional labor and intensifying competition within the working class in the capitalist metropolises of Europe. The political-ideological transformation of society according to the interests of capital cannot take place without the involvement of the classes remote from capital. Neither can the change in the technical basis of exploitation strategies, which, in turn, prepares the ground for neoliberal policies by securing the technical and organizational basis of global capitalism (Kaindl 2013, p. 22). Mobilization via (proto-)fascist parties becomes therefore a mechanism for involving classes remote from capital in social transformation. These parties, flexible and creative enough to reconcile diverse interests and reconfigure old racist schemes on the basis of the already existing, economically functional structure of discrimination, find success in mobilizing dissatisfaction with societal restructuring (Marvakis 2013).

The post-war era has given rise to significant societal constructs, namely the welfare state (with its social benefits including publicly funded social work) and solidarity-based workers' organizations, which serve as pillars of social unity. Paradoxically, these entities find themselves in direct opposition to neoliberal ideology, which advocates for minimal state intervention in social wealth distribution. Instead, the neoliberal agenda emphasizes state involvement in societal reform for market-driven purposes through stringent control and authoritative security measures (Schreiner 2015, p. 20). To legitimize this authoritarian security policy, neoliberal parties often resort to nationalist and racist rhetoric. The racist discourse plays a crucial role in justifying the calls to dismantle the welfare state in the name of liberation from "state paternalism" and to weaken solidarity organizations and democratic institutions. This strategy, framed as a battle against bureaucracy and elites, proves successful in mobilizing classes distanced from capital (cf. Schui et al. 1997, pp. 152.; Reimer 2013, pp. 33.). The crisis repercussions and dissatisfaction with societal restructuring fuel demands from below for the "restoration of order" in various aspects of social life. Neoliberal parties exploit alleged increases in crime rates, corruption, or misuse of social benefits, framing them as signs of moral decay or a crisis of authority. This narrative reflects "popular sentiment," providing a pretext for advocating for the extraordinary use of state force and control. Discussions about the 'wasteful' welfare state and the portrayal of welfare recipients as exploiting social benefits and living at the expense of society often incorporate elements of racist schemata (cf. Hall 2014, pp. 117).

Racist discourses in the neoliberal order serve the ideological function of shifting seemingly intractable social problems – including not only the consequences of economic dislocation (unemployment, homelessness, etc.), but also the antagonisms resulting from society's preparation for the free market (contradictory definitions of gender roles, moral contradictions, the crisis of

social institutions, etc.) – to a level where they can be framed as a manageable opposition between “us” and “them.” This translation presents a way to address these problems, seemingly offering a coping mechanism while alleviating the pressure created by social contradictions (Elfferding 2000, p. 43). This racist constitution of meaning provides an explanation for the directly experienced world, prescribing or implying a specific political strategy (Miles 2000, p. 26). The shift or displacement of social contradictions to another level is not an individual endeavor, but is orchestrated by social institutions such as the media, political parties, churches, and others (Elfferding, 2000, p. 43). This discourse, grounded in a vaguely defined, nation-state-bound “Leitkultur” (*dominant culture*), is reproduced by various actors (Völkel 2017, p. 92).

Thus, in social work practice, recognizing that racist tendencies are rooted in real fears is crucial. These fears emanate from a genuine concern about being bypassed by social change and losing agency. However, the solutions sought in racist tendencies are unrealistic, aiming for resolutions where the least resistance is to be expected, such as depriving migrants of their basic rights (Osterkamp 1991, p. 53). Racist discourses grapple with the experience of helplessness in the face of inscrutable social conditions, conveying the illusion of action at the expense of others. This illusory sense of agency is contingent on existing social conditions and implies an agreement with them.

The construction of one’s own group against a “foreign” one, aligning with the existing legal and social order, creates a “dominance culture.” This culture influences the attitudes, feelings, and interpretations of all members of society, viewing “foreigners” as deviations from societal norms due to their “cultural” peculiarities (Rommelspacher 1998, p.22). Racist parties and movements position themselves as guardians of the existing order and values. In essence, one’s “own national identity,” defined abstractly in terms of conformity with certain values and legal instances, translates to identification with existing power relations and a willingness to submit to them. The racist discourse ensures not only the subordination of the interests of the “others” to those of the “own” group, but also the obedience of members of the so-called “majority society” to the state and legal system (Kalpaka & Räthzel 2000, p. 182). On the political level, this discourse echoes in the neoliberal critique of the “incompetent” welfare state and the authoritarian demand for the restoration of order – preferably through a rebellion of lower classes against the existing order, which is, in reality, a demonstration of special loyalty to existing power relations and an attempt to gain agency through submission (Kalpaka & Räthzel 2017, pp. 182; Osterkamp 1996, p. 136).

We must perceive contemporary racism as a systemic construct. Within this system, two groups are delineated and juxtaposed based on the interests of capital and state interventions. One group is mandated to subordinate its interests to the other, while the privileged group enjoys specific rights and opportunities. To maintain these privileges, the privileged group is expected, in turn, to actively endorse this dichotomy by aligning with prevailing power structures. Racist and nationalist ideologies serve as tools to legitimize this conformity. Discriminated groups must forge their own coping mechanisms, strategies for action, and

avenues for resistance, which fundamentally differ from those of the privileged group.

Navigating the impact of racism on individuals

The persistent propagation of a racist discourse often coincides with a systematic denial of structural racism, narrowing the focus to extreme and violent manifestations typically associated with marginalized groups. This dual strategy serves to morally justify behavior aligned with social norms and, concurrently, undermines the foundation for collective resistance among those affected, relegating them to a minoritarian status in their protests (Van Dijk 1992, p. 105; Osterkamp 1996, pp. 158).

Recent events, such as “Black Lives Matter” demonstrations, the assertive stance of young people against racism on social media, and the establishment of organizations, have contributed to a heightened awareness of structural racism, especially among younger generations. However, in Austria, this awareness appears confined primarily to the educated middle class. Among those affected, coping with their situation—being subjected to structural discrimination and facing limited legitimate avenues to combat it due to systematic denial—manifests in various ways. For instance, there is a prevalent sense of general mistrust towards the so-called “majority society” and its institutions. This skepticism extends to the social work in its control function. Individuals encountering racism often perceive the “majority society” as complicit, as racist practices can persist only with the tacit approval of the majority, making the majority’s complicity more critical than overt acts of racism or individual racist statements. Moreover, discriminated individuals frequently find it unclear where social workers stand, questioning whether engaging with this professional group might expose them to further racist experiences. This distrust deepens—rightly so—when social workers inadvertently perpetuate racist or culturalist stereotypes and downplay experiences of racism. Given that this skepticism also extends to other institutions such as the police, the judiciary, schools, and the health system, individuals commonly opt to minimize interactions with social institutions and resolve issues within their own communities whenever possible, to avoid new racist encounters. This withdrawal into “safe spaces” is also observable in private spheres. Such a response to racist conditions is often criticized as the creation of “parallel societies” (*Parallelgesellschaft*), further limiting opportunities for those facing racism to disengage.

Some individuals, faced with relentless racist demands, capitulate in an attempt to achieve “full integration” or assimilation, often in vain. This surrender can result in the normalization of discrimination, either socially (“we are only guests here,” “it is like this everywhere”) or on an individual level (“because I wear different clothes,” “because I do not speak German well enough yet,” etc.). A prevalent form of normalization involves aligning with racist demands and adopting a hostile stance towards other targets of racism. The pressure for complete submission may lead to the hardening of positions, manifesting as

“counter-racism” or the cultivation of a nationalist or religious ideology, attempting to reverse the established hierarchy of power, albeit often idealistically.

Let brothers not fight!

The prevalent nationalist tendencies among migrants, culminating in the 2020 riots in Vienna, should be assessed in the context of the explanations offered thus far and in connection with the actual experiences of young people. Exploring the complex realm of ideologies within diaspora groups, particularly their potential for violence, serves as a focal point for practical pedagogical efforts with young people. While various coping strategies are employed, the retreat into nationalist and racist ideologies poses special challenges, rendering young individuals susceptible to manipulation. A poignant illustration of this phenomenon emerges from the 2020 riots in Vienna, which offer valuable insights into the functions of such ideologies within diaspora groups.

During the upheavals, as youth workers at the JUVIVO.21 youth center in Vienna’s 21st district, we were actively engaged with the events. Monitoring social media posts of the center’s visitors, contacting young demonstrators, and later incorporating the discussions into the center’s activities became integral aspects of our involvement. Subsequently, in 2021, we collaborated with young people from the center on a video project¹, drawing from a co-worker’s B.A. thesis, which explored the experiences of three young individuals connected to the riots (Gutschelhofer 2021). In this thesis, interviews were conducted with three young individuals, who were either actively involved in the riots or expressed a desire to participate, but were prevented by various reasons. Two of them identified as Turkish nationalists, while one considered himself aligned with Kurdish activists. One of these Turkish nationalist youths also participated in the video project. Furthermore, the project involved two other young men who, at the time, identified themselves as being affiliated with the Grey Wolves.

Based on the interviews and the young people’s experiences, a script was collectively developed. Throughout the process, the participants engaged in profound reflections on their motivations. A four-minute film was subsequently produced in collaboration with a skilled filmmaker, in which the young individuals actively participated, assuming leading roles. The video was shared on various platforms including TikTok, Instagram, and YouTube, and it was presented publicly. Besides participating in the public presentation, the young contributors also granted interviews to major newspapers. To make the film appealing to a wider audience of young people, elements of youth culture, including youth-friendly language and emotional scenes, were highlighted.

The video project is divided into four segments, with the initial part serving as a trailer. In the second segment, Atilla, a Turkish teenager, spends time in a

¹ The video project is a cooperation of the youth center JUVIVO.21 and bOJA (Bundesweites Netzwerk Offene Jugendarbeit); it can be accessed with English subtitles on the YouTube channel “Bro&Kontra” at https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tkmt-dwXpWY&ab_channel=Bro%26Kontra

park with his two friends. The news, circulating through social media, reveals that a Kurd has allegedly removed the headscarf of a Turkish woman during a demonstration, prompting a call for a gathering in Vienna's 10th district to protest. The young men decide to join. Witnessing the massive demonstration, Atilla feels an empowering sensation, akin to being the "boss of every Turk." However, conflicting thoughts arise as he remembers his mother's words: "Let brothers not fight against each other!"

In the third part, Atilla acknowledges the empowering feeling, but admits he fears potential violence. Despite the urge to leave, his pride prevails, and he decides to stay, worried that avoiding participation might result in exclusion. As they reach the top of a hill, tensions escalate, but older Turkish men intervene, advising them to return home, emphasizing that "enough is enough." Out of respect for the elders, the young men comply and exit the demonstration. Up to this point, the script draws from the actual experiences of the young men. The last part of the movie is a creative addition by the young men for dramatic effect.

In this concluding segment, the trio encounters a Kurdish boy on the street wearing a balaclava like the others, and assume he is the one responsible for the headscarf incident. Although Atilla is no longer inclined to engage in violence, his friends continue to egg him on, and eventually they succeed. After Atilla confronts and assaults the Kurdish youth, the young man removes his balaclava, revealing himself as a close friend of Atilla's; the two grew up together "like brothers." Atilla questions the sense in their conflict, pondering, "why are we actually fighting?" In an additional part, Atilla emphasizes that within his circle of friends, there is no distinction between Turks and Kurds – they consider themselves brothers and vow to resist getting turned against each other "no matter by which side."

The entire video project took approximately six months to finalize. Throughout the process, all three young participants distinctly distanced themselves from the Grey Wolves. Subsequently, in 2022, they collaborated with other young girls and boys from the youth center on another film that addresses violence against women.

Now, let's delve into some of the outcomes and results yielded by this project.

The notion of imaginary power: Understanding long-distance nationalism among diaspora youth

It's important to recognize that nationalist sentiments are not exclusive to Turkish youth in the diaspora. A perusal of Instagram accounts belonging to various young individuals with migration backgrounds reveals a plethora of self-descriptions such as "proud Turk," "proud Arab," "proud Muslim," "proud Albanian," "proud Kurdish," and more in their bios. While conducting a detailed sociological analysis of the reasons behind the success of right-wing ideologies among young people is beyond the scope of this article, a brief exploration of

Turkish nationalist tendencies among the youth can contribute to understanding the social context of Turkish nationalism in the diaspora.

Children of migrant families face a higher likelihood of being impacted by unemployment and poverty compared to their peers who do not experience racist discrimination (e.g., Algan et al., 2010). They directly contend with institutionalized and structural racism, along with segregation within school systems (Moris-Lange, Wendt, & Wohlfarth, 2013). Originating from traditional working-class backgrounds, they often struggle to acquire the necessary social skills demanded by the neoliberal economic order, facing disadvantages both at home and in schools characterized by segregation. Classical gender stereotypes exert a significant influence, contributing to their marginalization in the neoliberal labor market. These young individuals also keenly perceive everyday racism in political discussions and mass media.

Their apparent disinterest in the politics of the country in which they live often reflects a lack of opportunities for participation and their exclusion from politics. It is precisely in this context that young people encounter a dearth of opportunities for meaningful action, feeling powerless and overshadowed by the privileged. The nationalist ideologies of their families' countries of origin provide them with imagined avenues for action and spheres of influence. Benedict Anderson aptly characterizes these opportunities for action that *long-distance nationalism* unfolds:

The more a diaspora group feels excluded, disregarded, ignored and discriminated against, the more it tends to turn to the politics of its home country – especially when the country is in trouble. Then people start sending Internet messages, making propaganda, sending money, maybe even buying weapons. In rich Western countries, people can do many things that allow them to have a real influence on events at home. There are many diaspora communities whose homeland is in great trouble, torn apart domestically. But the condition for influence is that these people can imagine themselves as heroes, sometimes even heroines. They are fighting on the Internet, not on the battlefield, for their country, for liberation. And that's an entirely different experience (Anderson, 2012, pp. 41).

In this context, it is crucial to differentiate between nationalism and racism against “migrants” and the phenomenon of “long-distance nationalism” prevalent in diaspora communities. As previously underscored, in contemporary Western and Northern Europe's current manifestations of racism, the primary challenge lies in the abstract and conformist nature of one's “own” national identity, characterized by adherence to existing values and power structures. These power dynamics result from state interventions and are not mere constructs; they represent legal realities.

In contrast, long-distance nationalism does not necessitate conformity to the prevailing conditions of the nation-state where the diaspora resides. Instead, it offers an “imaginary” empowerment in an ancestral “imagined homeland” of parents or grandparents, even though individuals in the diaspora frequently experience discrimination in that “home country” as well. Nationalist ideology

asserts a willingness to embrace them as heroes or heroines, as they diverge from neoliberal society's expectations to acquire new social skills and develop "acceptable" coping mechanisms for their experiences of discrimination -given the reduced demand for cheap labor- in order to find a legitimate place in society.

Nationalism, in turn, idealizes their traditional way of life, gender norms, and responses to ethnic and social discrimination. Consequently, nationalism proposes that the marginalized group attains a position of power not only over other ethnic groups in their so-called "homeland," but also over the discriminatory segment of the society in the country of residence. Nationalist ideologies often associate the oppressed groups in the "homeland" with oppressors in Europe, creating the illusion of resistance against colonialism, imperialism, or even racism. For instance, it is common to encounter narratives in pro-government Turkish newspapers suggesting that European politicians instigate the Kurdish issue and insinuating that Kurdish organizations may enjoy the support and protection of European or North American governments.

The concept of being "actually" morally superior and the imagined prospect of returning to a "golden age" when one's "own" group held sway over others take precedence over the possibilities of action in the struggle against oppression in the country in which the diaspora group lives – a prospect that may seem impractical or perilous. Therefore, discussions on nationalist ideologies among so-called "migrants" cannot be isolated from the oppression they encounter and the existing power relations. Racism in the privileged sectors of society and the long-distance nationalism of diaspora groups represent two interrelated facets of the same issue.

Similarly, nationalism within the diaspora group is not necessarily synonymous with the nationalism advocated by nationalist parties and groups in the "homeland" for comparable reasons. Long-distance nationalism does not confer real power upon young people in the diaspora over marginalized groups in the "homeland," especially when they lack familiarity with the intricacies of that environment. In many instances, they may lack the social or linguistic leverage necessary to thrive in the "homeland." Genuine power might only be attainable in exceptional cases for individuals who have established robust connections with the "deep state" and are willing to engage in illicit activities on its behalf. In other cases, this power remains illusory and serves solely as a form of strong identification with oppressive groups. This imaginary power proves highly advantageous for the governments of the "homelands," and they consistently uphold it. While the European media may make minimal efforts to connect with migrants, pro-government media in the "home countries" strive to engage diaspora groups through special broadcasts and content. Governments view this as an opportunity to exert political influence and mobilize the diaspora, primarily as a significant source of funding.

Shaping Identity: The Interplay of Nationalism and Identity Formation in the Diaspora

Another crucial aspect is the role of nationalist ideologies in shaping identity. In this context, it is essential to consider not only the social aspects, but also the developmental psychological aspects. Within such a framework, the interplay of experienced ethnic discrimination and nationalist ideology is significant, exerting a profound influence on the identity formation of young people in the diaspora. The following statement of a young person explains his desire not to be considered a member of a discriminated group:

Well, it... with us, so we have, many Turks have complexes with such things. When you say. ‘Yes, you’re just a shitty Turk’ for example, the one who ... I’m one of those who gets upset when you say that, not from the point of view that I’m really a shitty Turk, but I don’t see myself as a Turk, but I see myself more as an Ottoman (Gutschelhofer, 2011, p. 23).

The inclination to identify as Ottoman may stem from a desire to escape the subordinate role associated with being a discriminated “guest worker” and instead assume a dominant position.

These notions of identity serve a practical purpose in daily life. Faced with constant discrimination, young individuals seek refuge by carving out niches in society where they are free from racist prejudice. Nationalist ideology plays a crucial role in binding these communities together. When a group shares the same nationalist beliefs, it ensures a sense of solidarity and understanding among its members, eliminating the need for constant explanations or justifications. In an interview as part of the video project, individuals who have distanced themselves from the Grey Wolves elaborate on the role of nationalist ideology in the formation of such groups:

“At the age of 13, everyone was a Bozkurt” [Grey Wolf, S.B.], Cengiz says. “But then you have no idea what that means either,” he says. For him, it simply meant being Turkish. “If I met someone, and he was also a Bozkurt, then it was easy: It’s ok. One word and you were friends,” Cengiz says. The two other boys nod as he says this. In the meantime, they know how wrong that is. “We all had abis [elder brothers, S.B.] who enlightened us at some point,” Atilla says. “Only children support the Bozkurt. And too much national pride is not good either.” (Küçüktekin 2021).

In the context of everyday conversations in youth work, it is frequently observed that young individuals identifying with the Grey Wolves and displaying far-right symbols possess limited knowledge about the Grey Wolves or the MHP. For them, the term “Grey Wolf” is used interchangeably with “proud Turk.” In these instances, the name and symbolism serve a distinct function in shaping identity and fostering a sense of group belonging within the diaspora.

Youth Cultural Dynamics: A Closer Look at Right-Wing Ideology's Allure

Youth cultural elements constitute a significant aspect, with the action-oriented nature of right-wing ideology proving particularly appealing to the younger demographic. This allure is evident in various cultural expressions such as popular TV series, Hip-Hop music, and numerous contemporary video games. These cultural media often glamorize a perilous lifestyle characterized by intense action, confrontations, and skirmishes, fostering an environment that resonates with the adventurous spirit of young individuals.

A young person in Favoriten explains in the following way why he participated:

“I was bored,” Cengiz recalls of June 25, when he got a message on his cell phone. “A Kurd pulled down a sister’s headscarf. Come all Reumann” [Reumann Square in Favoriten, S.B.]. “I thought: it’s ok. Action. I’m in!” says Cengiz. For the 17-year-old, it sounded like fun (Kücüktekin 2021).

A considerable number of participants remain unaware of the genuine motivations behind the riots in Favoriten. Young individuals, influenced by various rumors circulating through social networks, spontaneously chose to join the events. Beyond the element of enjoyment, the sense of belonging to a group holds significant sway in their participation. Reasons frequently cited by the youth include the reluctance to let down their friends (Gutschelhofer 2021, p. 24) and the desire to maintain a positive image within their peer group (Kücüktekin, 2021). The involvement of individuals from diverse ethnic backgrounds, such as Turks, Afghans, Chechens, Bulgarians, Pakistanis, etc., in the Favoriten riots can be attributed to youth cultural factors like loyalty to the peer group, a thirst for action, and an attraction to a perilous lifestyle. This confluence underscores that the attackers represented a mixture of young people from various ethnic origins, united by shared cultural inclinations.

Preventive Measures Against Nationalist Ideologies

The three dimensions of nationalist ideologies—imaginary power against oppression, identity-forming function, and youth cultural aspects—hold significant relevance in the context of preventive youth work. As previously outlined, young individuals can align themselves with the Grey Wolves and adopt their symbols without engaging in a formalized structure or possessing in-depth knowledge about the ideological background of the Grey Wolves. Both right-wing groups and entities associated with the Turkish “deep state” often target such youth for recruitment, as these individuals, perceived as heroic figures, bring with them a predisposition to manipulation and a willingness to employ violence. However, it is crucial to note that not every young person identifying with the Grey Wolves or their symbols is necessarily an organized and ideologically driven fascist.

In the context of preventive youth work, it is imperative to engage in reflective discussions with young people regarding the illusory avenues for action presented by nationalist ideologies. The ideal approach involves replacing these imaginary prospects with tangible opportunities to combat discrimination and oppression within the local context. A fundamental stance in this work is to genuinely acknowledge the experiences of discrimination faced by young individuals and to establish inclusive spaces for open discussions on these experiences, fostering the exploration of potential collective strategies for action. Preventive efforts should extend beyond addressing everyday racism to encompass a critical examination of structural and institutionalized racism as inherent social realities. It is essential to challenge not only the behaviors of those experiencing discrimination, but also to scrutinize the role of the nation-state and its legal interventions. Taking a stand for the oppressed serves a dual purpose—it strengthens one's capacity for action and serves as a positive role model for others within the community.

Nevertheless, in the realm of preventive work, meticulous attention must be dedicated to preventing the reproduction of prevailing power imbalances, especially between adult "European" youth workers and young individuals from migrant backgrounds. The approach should be characterized by equality, occurring at eye level and rooted in the specific interests and needs of the young people involved. Youth work in this context assumes a role of solidarity and support, diverging from a traditional "educational" stance that may inadvertently perpetuate power dynamics. Instead, the emphasis lies on fostering a collaborative environment where an exchange of experiences can occur both among the young participants themselves and with those engaged in youth work. This approach aims to facilitate mutual understanding and create a space for shared learning and growth.

Engaging in collective discussions on the intricacies of identity formation and actively reframing nationalist narratives are other crucial components of preventive work. The challenge does not lie in the fact that a group of young individuals identifies themselves as Turks, as this identification is predominantly externally defined. The true concern emerges from the construction of their Turkish identity through the marginalization of other groups.

The process of reframing presents an opportunity to preserve group identity without succumbing to nationalist narratives. For instance, one can take pride in being a Turk without aligning with the Young Turks responsible for the Armenian Genocide of 1915. There exists the possibility of embracing Turkish heritage by identifying with individuals who opposed the Young Turk policies and demonstrated solidarity with Armenian civilians. This approach encourages a nuanced and inclusive perspective on identity, fostering a sense of pride rooted in shared values rather than divisive historical events.

Preventive work extends to addressing the cultural aspects of youth. This involves recognizing the significance of the enjoyment factor, approaching the topic with humor, and providing alternative enjoyable activities for young individuals. Continuous dialogue with young people, staying informed about youth culture, and actively engaging with the latest trends in music, media, and

social networking are vital components of prevention work. Open conversations about friendship styles, relationships, and life concepts contribute to creating a supportive environment. In this context, it remains crucial to critically examine and challenge nationalist and patriarchal narratives, assisting young people in developing their own life concepts and friendship styles that align with their current interests. The fundamental pillar of preventive work lies in adopting an interested, stance-taking, open, needs-oriented, relationship-building, and solidarity-based approach. However, it would be counterproductive for prevention efforts to hastily draw conclusions without first comprehending the genuine reasons behind young people's actions.

Critical Reflections on Social Work in the Context of Racist and Nationalist Ideologies

In conclusion, I would like to share some reflections on anti-racist social work. These considerations hold significance not only due to their practical implications, but are also imperative for the very survival of the social work profession. The connection between social work and racism extends beyond providing support to those impacted by racism or working with individuals susceptible to racist ideologies.

The neoliberal narrative, infused with racist and nationalist ideologies, establishes a paradigm where a group's right to existence is contingent upon its performance. This perspective grants social work legitimacy only in its role as serving the activating state. In this framework, the state views social benefits purely as a transactional arrangement, compelling social work to focus on disciplining individuals to proactively seek employment. Consequently, the sense of solidarity within society diminishes, transforming social work into a tool for enforcing discipline and control dictated by the capitalist market. The emphasis on individual subjectivity and advocacy progressively takes a backseat, yielding ground to administrative logic and the burgeoning demands of the market (Seithe 2010, p. 200; Thoma 2016, p. 61).

As political subjects, both in their theoretical frameworks and through their practical applications, social workers not only (re)produce social relations, but are also active participants within these very relationships and inevitably shaped by them. Consequently, their concern should extend beyond expanding clients' possibilities for action to encompass their own constrained possibilities within the neoliberal system. The foundational choice of social work practitioners to engage in social work institutions is intricately linked to whether they acknowledge their own limitations and are content to function as agents of activation, discipline, and control for the market, thereby (whether consciously or unconsciously) perpetuating discriminatory conditions. Overcoming this restrictive mindset aligned with existing social relations requires recognizing one's position as a political subject. This recognition transcends social workers merely advocating for their clients due to a presumed high level of professional ethics or inherent "goodness." Instead, it involves acknowledging that the

neoliberal system is actively undermining social solidarity. This system is steering social workers, in their professional practice, towards a controlling function at the expense of their aiding role, while also subjecting them to precarious conditions as wage workers. However, social workers can emancipate themselves from this system by realizing that their interests fundamentally align with those of their clients. Both social workers and their clients must collectively develop possibilities for action within and against the neoliberal system. Social work cannot evade scrutinizing the internal connections between prevailing racist ideologies, which seek to fragment and desolidarize society, and the transformation of its own professional image according to market demands. It is crucial to bear in mind that, while the neoliberal system restricts possibilities of action, it also undeniably opens up new fields and opportunities for action. This transformation affects not only the structures and forms of social work, but also its content, problems, target groups, and themes (cf. Marvakis 2016).

A crucial aspect of this analysis involves dedicated reflection on the theories that underpin social work practice, even if practitioners are not always consciously aware of them (Holzkamp 2012). Central to such reflection would be the transformation of the conception of humanity and society within the realm of social work. This is particularly significant because the neoliberal, activating welfare state, with its portrayal of individuals emphasizing self-responsibility, necessitates the individualization of social issues and advocates for a form of social work that is both individualized and depoliticized.

To comprehend and address racism effectively, social work must initially scrutinize the functionality and significance of racist schemas, taking into account the structures within which individuals operate (Kalpaka & Rätzkel 2017, pp. 23.). Emphasizing social relations and the social mediation of individual issues, as noted by Osterkamp (1991, p. 58), does not imply absolving individuals (including social workers) of the responsibility for their racist behaviors. Instead, it suggests that these behaviors can be dialectically transcended as potential courses of action within the framework of evolving social conditions and the circumstances of perceived helplessness.

This intricate interplay between social structures and individual actions demands a particular focus from social work. It necessitates a thorough examination and reflection on social work's own participation in existing social relations, as well as its alignments with the prevailing mode of production and configurations of power. A precise analysis of social work's dual role - as both help and control - aids in differentiating instances of resistance from those affected by racism, even when such resistance might not be immediately apparent – consider, for instance, the public wearing of religious symbols like a headscarf. In such a scenario, imposing one's own models of emancipation onto others as a universal standard and, for example, problematizing submission to religious or patriarchal authorities, entails a certain alignment with the existing power structure. The power structure does not demand that subjects emancipate themselves or submit to non-patriarchal authorities; rather, it dictates submission to the instances within the existing constellation. Consequently, the issue at hand is not submission in itself, but submission to the 'wrong' authorities. Hence, it is

crucial for social work to dissect power constellations in relation to its own actions to genuinely grasp the emancipatory moments within the target group (cf. Kalpaka & Räthzel 2000, p. 188). A headscarf, for instance, can symbolize submission to patriarchy and *simultaneously* serve as a form of protest, a resistance against racist discrimination, highlighting one's divergence from the colonialist through personal appearance.

Effectively addressing racism within the realm of social work requires a comprehensive approach that incorporates racist discrimination as a foundational social structure in the analysis of individual and societal issues, as well as within the framework of its own activities. This entails honing a discerning perspective that identifies instances of both arrangement and resistance among those involved, including social workers. Just as the young people's embrace of long-distance nationalism can be viewed as an alignment with power relations in their envisioned "homeland" and simultaneously as a resistance to power relations in their current locale, the rejection of any nationalist ideology per se by youth workers may also serve as an alignment with existing power structures. Confronting this complexity necessitates a commitment to learning from young people, adopting a stance of solidarity that avoids premature conclusions, and instead collaboratively exploring the motivations behind the actions of young people. This approach involves a critical analysis of both their motives and one's own reasons for action.

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Society – racism – psychology(critique)

Athanasios Marvakis

Abstract

In approaching social phenomena like racism, psychology shows great interest in the individual, but also lures the individual into a trap: although social phenomena like racism are first and foremost moments in our societies' dis/order, the social possibilities and impositions on individuals are left out and the subjective functionality of racism for individuals' action also remains unnamable. The action-theoretical approach proposed here opposes psychology's prevailing *modus operandi* towards social phenomena, which works with dichotomies (e.g., normal vs. deviant). It also goes beyond the tunnel-vision on individuals that assumes that the expert is an uninvolved codifier of normality, evaluator and judge of subjects. In this context, a first task of a (critical) psychology is the critical reconstruction of prevailing concepts and terminologies – explicitly also those created and used by psychologists themselves – with all their connotations about and orientations toward society, the individual and their mutual relationship. A second task necessitates the clarification of different subject positions, interests within the concrete social fabric, aiming at making them intersubjectively, politically communicable and negotiable; not as (allegedly neutral) assessor vs. client, but as political subjects in a struggle about the nature and future of the societal order and the allocation of social resources herein.

Keywords

action-theory, political orientations, racism as orientation, critical psychology, political grammar

Our programme must be: the reform of consciousness not through dogmas, but by analysing mystical consciousness obscure to itself, whether it appears in religious or political form.¹ (Karl Marx 1844, Letter to Arnold Ruge, MEW 1, p. 346)

I. The discomfort with psychological culture

Not so long ago, the term 'racism' was used rather reluctantly in the German academic landscape. Something so grimy was confined to the brief period of Nazi Germany ... or maybe to circumstances in other countries; at the time, often South Africa. If at all, in Germany, racism existed only among a small minority of die-hards; it was a phenomenon at the 'margins of society'- and thus not particularly relevant. In recent decades, one can observe a veritable multiplication in the usage of the term, usually employed with the help of a hyphen to refer to different affected groups: anti-black racism, anti-Muslim racism, etc. However, the multiplication in usage has not been accompanied by the necessary theoretical clarification by the social sciences. Thus, the use has remained rather random and arbitrary - and it merely follows certain (disciplinary) 'conventions'.

In and around psychology, it is customary to start from the apparent 'near space' when reconstructing social phenomena like 'racism' (or other unpleasant -isms, such as nationalism, right-wing extremism, etc.), i.e. to start from the individual and their 'inner life.' Terms such as 'prejudice', 'bias', 'stereotype', etc. demarcate this 'near space.' However, this common practice in psychology does not only express its explicit interest in the individual. On the contrary. This 'near space' is usually never again exited or surpassed, neither in theory nor in other psychological practices. And thus the 'near space' turns from an initial interest in the individual, to a final stage, a trap for the individual. In the glare of the psychological spotlight, social possibilities *and* impositions on the individuals disappear.

In the following, I would like to clarify my discomfort with this prevailing psychological culture in four steps. In doing so, I want to explore the possible functions and functionalities of racism – as our example of a social phenomenon - from three different perspectives:

1. Racism from the perspective of society

In our societies, 'racism' is first and foremost an expression of social/societal dis/order. Several structural contradictions organize the fabric of our societies along lines of belonging to class, gender, 'race' (colonialism), etc. Racism is hereby first and foremost a (pre)condition for individual action.

2. Racism from the perspective of concrete subjects

¹ „Unser Wahlspruch muss also sein: Reform des Bewusstseins nicht durch Dogmen, sondern durch Analyse des mystischen, sich selbst unklaren Bewusstseins, trete es nun religiös oder politisch auf.“ (https://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1843/letters/43_09-alt.htm)

However, racism also has a subjective function or functionality for individuals, since it contributes to the anticipation and orientation of individual action within the conflictual societal dis/order.

3. Racism from the perspective of psychology

In this societal nexus, psychology has also been involved - now for over 100 years - as an assessor of normality. This specific disciplinary conceit is no accident; quite the contrary. Since the beginning of the 20th century, the dominant, dichotomizing view on social phenomena such as racism, has served, uncritically, psychology's position in the 'historical deal' between (societal) power and the social sciences: servitude, servility for the promise of (or only the hope for) compensation and prestige.

From here we can deduce some tasks for a critical psychology: a) Identification of positions and interests of individual subjects in the nexus of the historical structural conflicts in our society and the distinct possibilities *and* restrictions for individual subjects within these positions. b) (Disciplinary) Self-reflection also about the entanglement of psychology in this nexus by means of the (theoretical or practical) tools used, i.e., the concepts and technologies/practices applied. Only this self-reflection will enable us to identify the respective 'political orientations' within these structural conflicts and social positions and make them negotiable for the subjects involved, not from the position of an '*assessor vs. client*', but with mutual respect as political subjects.

II. The perspective of society: racism as a (pre)condition for individual action

In societies as we have come to know them historically so far, *racism* is - first and foremost - an aspect, an expression of social order, or rather: of societal disorder. The dynamic fabric of our societies is riddled with structural contradictions. Through 'belonging,' 'affiliation' with, or better: through allocation to, class, gender, 'race' (colonialism), etc., our societies are organized in a hierarchical and contradictory grid, an 'order,' in which individuals must develop and realize their actions. And it would be most surprising if such contradictions in social reality did not encounter inconsistencies and contradictions in the individual consciousness (Thomas Barfuss, 2002, talks about 'bizarre consciousness').

Racism - as a historically concrete social phenomenon - owes its existence and functions to the development, the dynamics, and the struggles in our societies.

However, the capitalist 'penetration' of society, of the world, does not affect everyone and everywhere, nor in the same way. There was never and nowhere (only) one, possibly dominant, way of working, living, and desiring that would have applied to everyone - neither within a 'single' society, nor 'internationally.' Not all (social groups of) people live in the same historical Now - with the same opportunities and impediments for individual subjects!

International dynamics shape capitalism and individual societies as neither static, nor 'national,' or homogeneous. Capitalism is an international system. This can only mean that 'society' cannot simply refer to a single state or a single 'nation.' Rather, societies are geo-political spaces that enter unequal international relations with respective centers and peripheries (a "pecking order" - I. Wallerstein). Thus, even neoliberalism - as the latest form of capitalist organization of our societies - is different in capitalist 'core' countries compared to the 'peripheries.' In its dynamics, capitalism integrates geo-political, social spaces, people, resources, and forms of living into the capitalist nexus of utilization, into capitalist reproduction. For this purpose, at the latest since the beginning of the 20th century, 'useful' knowledge from social sciences has also been in demand for 'governmentality,' i.e., for the support *and*, at the same time, the control of the population.

The *structural contradictions* - such as racism, sexism, classism - constitute, but also create multi-layered relations of domination and produce different political subjects, who struggle about the social dis/order and for access to social resources. The relationships of such political subjects to each other shape societies historically and geo-politically. Any geo-politically particular psychology also depends on these encounters and confrontations with structural contradictions - in at least three fields: as scientific subject matter, as academic discipline, and as professional work.

In the context of this chapter, these brief references to social dis/order mean simply that racism is first and foremost a *pre-condition* for the actions of individual subjects. By necessity, the individual subjects always act *in* or *from* their particular position and situation within the hierarchical and contradictory social fabric. Without a conception of society, including a prospect to change or overcome it, there can be no reasonable discussion about racism. Only with the perspective of a society with equal access to social resources, goods, and opportunities for all individuals does it even make sense to address racism (in theory or/and in practice).

As I see it, moralistic rants by social scientists as experts about or against racism, even if critically motivated, are not *scientifically* wrong in a specific way - which would mean they could be revised and corrected. Rather, this kind of critique is helpless; ultimately, it demonstrates precisely the helplessness of any *abstract* criticism. It might even contribute to the justification of existing racism through the psychologization of social phenomena - whether intended or not by the individual social scientist, the 'expert'!

III. The perspective of the subjects: Racism as an orientation for/in individual action

For the *second* step, let us change our angle and adopt the perspective of the subjects. Here, an action-theoretical viewpoint offers us the possibility of tracing subjects' 'benefit,' the subjective functionality of racism for individual action, without limiting it to some kind of 'deviation.' To summarize it in one sentence:

Racism (or anti-racism) is *one possible* orientation for the (theoretical and practical) actions of subjects. Racism gives individual action a *specific* direction and alignment.

The basic model of action

To make this comprehensible, we need some space to elaborate² - starting with the psychological components of 'action', which Gerhard Kaminski describes as follows (1981, p. 95f.):

... An activity designated as 'action' leads over a period of time towards a state which can be regarded as a 'targeted state.' If the activity is to be *oriented* towards this final state, this state must, before it is realized, already be somehow available as a *representation*, as an anticipation with which the activity must be *comparable* in its *intermediate results*.³

Kaminski distinguishes two logical stages in an action:

The functional whole of an action is, roughly speaking, divided initially into two sections, a *realization section* and an *orientation section* serving the preparation for realization. Both sections are conceived as 'laps,' functioning as a feedback loop (1981, p. 107).⁴

These two "functional sections" are not disconnected from each other; rather, they are interconnected by agents of decision-making that decide whether the 'loop,' in which the action is presently located, can be continued or whether it is necessary to switch to the respective other functional circle or aspect (ibid.). The anticipatory and aligning moments, as discrete 'functional sections' of action are delineated with the term *orientation*. All dimensions referring to the content (such as needs) and all functional aspects (such as cognition, emotion, motivation) of the psychical activity can be valuable for anticipation and alignment - the 'orientational fundament' of action - and can be used for it.

Let us start with a simple example to reconstruct the orientational activity:⁵

A scientist has arrived at the main railway station of city X and initially follows the signs 'To the exit.' In the concourse, she finds herself confronted with an abundance of advertising slogans, interspersed with 'pictograms' and various informational signs, among which she first searches for indications for public transport, taxis, etc. She ignores all unimportant script, pictures, etc. and tries to

² For a systematic and contextualized presentation see Marvakis 1996.

³ "... Eine als ‚Handlung‘ bezeichnete Tätigkeit führt über eine Zeitstrecke hin zu einem Zustand, den man als ‚Zielzustand‘ ansehen kann. Wenn die Tätigkeit sich an diesem Endzustand orientieren soll, muss er, bevor er verwirklicht ist, schon irgendwie als Repräsentation verfügbar sein, als Antizipation, mit der das Tätigsein in seinen Zwischenergebnissen zu vergleichen sein muss."

⁴ "Das Funktionsgesamt einer Handlung wird, grob gesehen, zunächst in zwei Abschnitte aufgeteilt, einen Realisierungsteil und einen der Realisierungsvorbereitung dienenden Orientierungsteil. Beide Abschnitte sind als ‚Schleifen‘ konzipiert, funktionieren regelkreisartig." (1981, p. 107)

⁵ The example is taken from a textbook on perceptual psychology; Stadler et al. 1975, p. 207.

take in only the information that is relevant to her at that moment. Once she has arrived at her hotel room, she will study various brochures from the local tourist office, the city map, and other writings in order to familiarize herself theoretically with the city. Here she builds a first, very abstract and provisional, 'operative system of representation' that will later serve her as tentative orientation during a first walking tour of the city, and which will be simultaneously concretized, verified, and filled with sensual data and knowledge.⁶

In this example, we are dealing with an individual and a finite 'problem' for action. 'Orientation' here means the immediate alignment (of action) with a given, known and unmistakable 'outcome' (in our example also literally). In the railway station, the meanings relevant for orientation, being societally produced offers for orientation, are universally 'plausible,' and so there is no need for further problematization. Any potential problematization here would have the aim of increasing the efficiency of the orienting signals and meanings; for instance, if the signs were found to lead too many people astray instead of to the exit.

If, however, human actions were limited to such individual (eventually also inter-active) and unproblematic action performances (*Handlungsvollzüge*), the scope of the 'orientation section' in the "functional whole of action" (Kaminski) would remain curtailed. Lest we miss our topic - racism -, we must extend the 'basic model of action' as described by Kaminski. In societal conditions, orientation is not characterized by a quantitative increase in formal complexity, but by a series of qualitative changes that assign new character to action and its orientation.

Orientation in the nexus of activity and the division of labor

In its elementary form, *orientation* signifies the anticipatory and aligning moments in the "functional whole of action" (Kaminski). However, within societal life, the (re)production of the "functional whole" attains a different quality. Here, it is part of a cooperative context of activity based on the division of labor, which neither begins nor ends with the beginning or end of an individual action. The individual subject can neither sensorily 'grasp' nor 'perceive' this collective, societal context with its reliance on the division of labor; rather it must be 'thought.' This 'invisibility', 'inconceivability' of the

⁶ "Eine Wissenschaftlerin ist am Hauptbahnhof der Stadt X angekommen und folgt mit ihrem Gepäck zunächst einmal den Schildern ‚Zum Ausgang‘. In der Bahnhofshalle findet sie sich einer Fülle von Reklamesprüchen, eingestreuten "Piktogrammen" und verschiedenen Hinweisschildern gegenüber, in denen sie als erstes nach Hinweisen auf öffentliche Verkehrsmittel, Taxis usw. durchmustert. Hierbei übersieht sie alle unwichtigen Schriften, Bilder usw. und versucht nur die für sie jetzt gerade relevanten Informationen aufzunehmen. Hat sie einmal ihr Hotelzimmer erreicht, wird sie verschiedene Prospekte des örtlichen Verkehrsbüros, den Stadtplan und andere Schriften studieren um sich so mit der Stadt zunächst einmal theoretisch bekannt zu machen. Hier baut sie ein erstes, sehr abstraktes und vorläufiges operatives Abbildsystem auf, das ihr später bei einem ersten Rundgang zur versuchsweisen Orientierung dient und das dabei gleichzeitig konkretisiert, überprüft und mit sinnlichen Daten und Wissen gefüllt wird."

societal context of activity has as a first consequence the fact that orientation *within* it can only be 'thought' through *concepts* of this abstract societal context.

The distinction between orientation of action in a 'narrower' (our basic model) and a 'broader' sense (within the societal context) necessitates a qualitative extension: Orientation in the 'broader sense' no longer refers only to an individually accumulated 'stock of orientation'; rather, in the superordinate nexus of activity within society, the 'stock of orientation' means something completely new and qualitatively different. Any discussion about the orientation of individuals' actions thus must be a discussion of the *concepts* used for/in their orientation. More precisely, it must be a discussion of the implicit and explicit *premises* and *consequences* inherent in the concepts used for the 'thinking' of the societal nexus of action - including all possibilities *and* restrictions of these orientational concepts. In these discussions, 'my' concepts, which may lead me to criticize 'your' concepts, are just as much under scrutiny as yours, i.e., they must be substantiated and grounded in the same way. In such discourses, there is no - supposedly scientific - 'standpoint above' the concepts being used, criticized, or justified. Rather, there is a constant obligation to convince each other and a demand for inter-subjective - political - dispute about the respective premises and consequences behind those concepts, with all their possibilities *and* restrictions, together with their implicit constructs of humanity and society.

Because of the existing division of labor within the societal nexus of activity, individual orientation is no longer simply an individual, psychic activity. Individual actions can serve the collective need for orientation or vice versa, collective actions can serve individual orientational needs. Within the societal nexus, action is no longer limited to individual actions, therefore orientations can also no longer be limited to individual orientations. Out of the necessity for individual orientation within collective activity arises the question about the relationship between *individual* goals/interests and *collective* goals/interests. A clarification of this question is important lest the *motivation* of (individual) action be conceptually confined to *internalized coercion*, and (individual) orientation be restricted to an *adaptation* to given social orientational meanings. This 'problematic' relationship between individual and collective goals/interests obliges us to see the new way of relating between *individual* subjects and *societal* orientational meanings, which necessitates and relies on a subjective, agentive reference by the individual subject to the meanings of societal orientations.

The new societal activity nexus, based on the division of labor, also leads to the explicit *production* of orientation, more precisely, the production of orientational meanings. The superordinate activity context produces '*orientation guidelines*' or '*tools*' that are available to the individuals. Now, I, as an individual, can draw on relevant guides - even if it is only for my individual orientation. In the process of societal development, historically concrete *orientational institutions* are created, as institutionalized guides for orientation. These can take various forms - including *artifacts* such as dictionaries - as well as *institutions* in the more common sense, such as career counseling, universities, etc., which also function as orientational guides. Nowadays one should not forget to point to the importance of *mass* and *social media* as a societally produced

'orientational guide.' Certain *social arrangements*, too, can work as societal orientational guides, for example the structuring of one's course of life according to generational patterns.

Contradictory orientational meanings and subjective orientations

The societal process of life production is by no means characterized by 'uniformity' and 'harmony' regarding the meanings, intentions, goals etc. that are created in it. Domination and the unequal distribution of power characterize social relations and have consequences for the types and the quality of orientational meanings. It is therefore not surprising that societally produced meanings for orientation are contested and contradictory and convey mystifications about these relations of domination and power. The anticipation and orientation of (human) action must therefore be understood as an *orientation in contradictions*. And such an *orientation in contradictions* is impossible without a reflexive and critical relationship of the individual subjects towards the societally offered meanings for orientation!

Orientations, as societally produced meanings and as subjective orientation, are dually determined or overdetermined. It is important to take this dual determination into account if action is to mean not only *adaptation* to given requirements, but also active *intervention* and change. Actual, subjective orientations do not merely mirror fundamental societal conditions - more or less accurately. Rather, the acts of orientation are also acts of intervention in these conditions. The intervention can be differentiated as either '*legitimizing*'/'*reproductive*' with regard to the given social conditions, or as '*resistant*' and/or '*transcendent*' towards these conditions. Orientation within contradictory societal conditions thus oscillates between two poles: (1) orientation along given social presets and principles and thus reproduction of existing conditions and social order; and (2) orientation in transcending the given, prevailing guides. Klaus Holzkamp is quite clear on this:

In every situation in which the securing or the expansion of life possibilities becomes subjectively urgent for the individual, there is always the alternative: either using the existing possibilities for action within the structured meanings of the immediate life world; or transcendence of immediacy by expanding the availability, the disposition on the objective societal conditions of life; thereby also changing the possibilities for action given in the immediate references of meaning (Holzkamp 1983, p. 398f.).⁷

⁷ "Es besteht in jeder Situation, innerhalb welcher die Sicherung oder Erweiterung von Lebensmöglichkeiten für das Individuum subjektiv dringlich wird, stets die Alternative: entweder Nutzung der bestehen-den Handlungsmöglichkeiten innerhalb der Bedeutungsstrukturen der unmittelbaren Lebenswelt, oder Überschreitung der Unmittelbarkeit durch Erweiterung der Verfügung über die objektiven gesellschaftlichen Lebensbedingungen und darüber Veränderung der in den unmittelbaren Bedeutungsbezügen gegebenen Handlungsmöglichkeiten." (Holzkamp 1983, p. 398f.)

The contradictory nature of societal meanings for orientation also points us to the necessarily emotional evaluation within the orientation of individual action. Such an emotional evaluation is articulated, for example, in reflexive questioning of the relevance of a certain orientation meaning - relevance, though, not in an instrumental rationality, merely for the optimization of the subsequent segment of action. What is essential for the subjective orientation is the (emotional-evaluative) reflection and questioning of the personal 'sense' of the action problem. Our human orientation/action is thus characterized by thinking as problem-*posing* (problem-stellendes Denken), rather than merely thinking as problem-*solving* (problem-lösendes Denken). Human beings do not only 'think on commission' (Auftragsdenken) in the context of 'acting on demand' (Auftragshandeln). Rather, instead of only thinking and acting to *follow* goals, human beings also pursue thinking that *sets* goals (ziel-setzend).

In psychological theories, however, the *emergence* and the *posing* of problems are not problematized or are not theoretically negotiable at all. Due to this conceptual gap, the anticipatory moments in orientation can – according to psychological theorizing - only serve in adapting and optimizing individual orientation *vis-à-vis* (*pre-*)*given* (action) problems. Orientation is conceived as mere *reproduction*. This kind of conceptualizations do not contain constructive, 'transcending', projective, designing aspects – not even as a possibility. The theoretical design is thus formulated *from* and confined *to* the standpoint of societal demands *on* subjects; however, a social/societal 'necessity' cannot and does not automatically result in an individual/subjective 'necessity.'

The differentiation between conventional/reproductive and resistant/transcendent (in social meanings for orientation and concrete subjective orientations) is in no way meant to assess and sort - much less to defame - individual subjects. Rather, it is intended as an enlightening, revealing question to the subjects themselves, to 'me', with the aim of helping 'me' to better decode and comprehend the references to society in 'my' orientations. However, this function is not realized by a theoretical distinction alone. Rather, what is needed is an integrative research-practice-arrangement, in which the researched subjects are not barred from formulating research questions and accessing results. What is necessary are conceptualizations that do not stand in the way of such processes. To be able to gauge the 'usefulness' of the individual methodological steps/components, an overall concept is needed that integrates the relationship between theory, empirical research, and practice. Only the integration of these components into an open '*spiral of theory, empirical research and practice*' can eventually decide their respective 'quality.'

The potential assertion that orientation contains only reproduction *of* or adaptation *to* social given meanings must be an empirically concrete statement. If it is that, the argument itself must be addressed critically towards the very social conditions that demand such adaptation: the situation appears to 'me' to be so immovable or so overpowering that adaptation remains my only 'reasonable' choice for my orientation and action.

Political Orientation

The natural-historical new, human quality of life in a society presupposes *and* creates a new relationship between the individuals and the "self-sustaining societal system" (Holzkamp 1983, p. 485). In this historically novel *societal* space, new forms and qualities of possibilities and necessities for orientation of individuals' action emerge, which we can call *political orientations*. Political orientations, too, must encompass the fundamental characteristics of orientation *sui generis*: they must facilitate anticipation and alignment of action - meaning that political orientations cannot be conceived as more or less faithful or true images of societal conditions. Rather, political orientations retain and express the real relationship between the individual subjects in their concrete societal positions/situation and the superordinate societal conditions - as reflected by the subjects themselves and as mediated through their individual position and subjective experience. *Political* orientations also incorporate the creative, productive aspects of action; in other words, the subjective evaluations are part of concrete political orientations. 'My' political orientations are therefore subjective references to societal conditions; 'my' political orientations articulate 'my' subjective relationship to these societal conditions. From the standpoint of the individual subject, political orientations are perspectival references towards societal conditions, towards society as a 'whole,' be it in the form of 'attitudes', 'value decisions,' or other *premises for action*. The political orientation of 'my' action is based not only on images of the status quo, not only on 'representations of the present,' but also on imaginings for the future. The anticipatory moments of orientation include a stance on where-to society should *develop*.

Concrete subjects have dual options in their references to societal orientational meanings, which must also apply to political orientations. Subjects can either 'accept' given political orientational meanings and 'reproduce' them in their subjective orientations or they can attempt to 'transcend' given social orientational meanings. Concrete reference of individual subjects to political meanings can therefore be 'conventional,' not questioning the socially given, dominant meanings, and thus directing action in accordance and alignment with these meanings. Alternatively, individual subjects can also resist and transcend the dominant societal orientational meanings.

As mentioned earlier, the distinction here between 'conventional' and 'transcending' orientations serves only analytical purposes; it does not describe or judge concrete empirical phenomena. It is important to remember the contradictory nature of (societal) orientational meanings. Individual subjects do not face simple binaries – such as having to choose between 'conventional' and 'transcending' orientations. Rather, political orientations are ultimately orientations within contradictions.

This dual determination of political orientations points us to the problem of the underlying image of society and humanity (Gesellschafts- und Menschenbild): Are political orientations conceived as an expression (as a moment) of a 'fixed', determined development, where they can only be an articulation of 'normality' or 'deviation'? Or are political orientations also seen

as subjectively evaluative and constructive moments towards existing social conditions? Do political orientations merely echo existing societal conditions (as seen from the concrete situation and position of the individual subject), or are societal conditions also ‘constructed’ in/through subjective orientations? Such ‘constructive’ moments point to the *‘future reference’* of political orientations. Political orientations provide answers to questions such as: what should societal conditions be like? In which direction should society develop?

Political orientations also contain subjective ‘settings,’ determinations (Setzungen) in relation to societal conditions. These ‘settings,’ ‘value decisions,’ or ‘transcendences’ do not just appear out of thin air; rather, they are socially mediated in numerous ways. In an empirical investigation of political orientations, these orientations cannot be reduced only to their ‘reproductive’ moments regarding the given societal (orientational) meanings; their ‘productive’ (creative, critical, etc.) aspects must be conceptualized as well. Political orientations of individual subjects emerge always from a relationship between reproductive and productive components. Political orientations – e.g., of young people – can only be reasonably understood if one considers the holders’ concrete positions within the societal structure of social inequality.

If political orientations are *generally* conceived as subjective references to societal conditions, they are simultaneously *specific* references from individual subjects’ concrete social situations and positions, i.e., from their particular positioning in the societal structure of social inequality. These individual, subjective references include both ‘reconstructive’ moments, in which the relevant aspects of society are captured, and ‘perspectival’ moments, in which the captured societal reality is either legitimized or ‘transcended’ towards a certain direction. The aim of pedagogical and political work would be to uncover the dual aspects – eg. in young people’s orientations – so that the ‘subjective movement’ in their political orientations can be more clearly articulated. To take young people’s political orientations seriously cannot mean to merely criticize them about how ‘racist,’ or ‘right-wing’ they are.

In the concrete political orientations of individual subjects, certain aspects of the social conditions are emphasized, while others do not play a significant role. Subjective orientations therefore also signify the selection of aspects of social conditions that are essential for the subjective orientation of action. The fact that a foreign youngster is a foreigner may be important to them at that concrete biographical moment, and they may have a more reflective and critical orientation about this ‘being foreigner’ than another foreign youth for whom gender identity or their status as a student currently appears more relevant. Such subjective selection processes are important especially in empirical research since the respective subjective importance or urgency of certain aspects of an individual’s social conditions cannot be *derived* according to some social theory. In other words, conceptualizations of society are one thing, while empirical enquiries are another, entirely different thing.

Political orientations are not ‘characteristics of a person’ (Personen-Eigenschaften), since they already embody mediations between the societal conditions and the individual subjects through their concrete social position and

experience. Political orientations, therefore, never articulate the *immediate* effects or influences of societal conditions *on* subjects. Rather, orientations are products of a subject's psychological activity in certain societal conditions. Thus, political orientations are already *ways of dealing with reality* as this reality is perceived by the subjects. In individual political orientations, we observe *subjective ways of dealing with* societal meanings and relations. This points us to an individual subject's life story (Lebensgeschichte) and thus to their learning processes as an important background for their current political orientations.

From a different angle, political orientations also represent a subject's 'stance' towards the societal whole, the overall societal structure of social inequality. Importantly, the term 'stance' here should not be understood in a simplified cognitivist way. Rather, in their subjective statements, individuals 'reflect' (and evaluate in their emotions) on their own standpoint within the structure of social inequality; in other words, an individual's political stance is a subjective self-positioning vis-à-vis this structure. Such subjective positioning encompasses the subjects' *perspectivity* as it appears to them and as they design it as a project of their actions. A subject's (political) orientations therefore comprise:

- their own social situation and position in the societal conditions;
- their perceptions of this situation and position;
- their conceptual comprehension of their subjective situation and conditions at large;
- their projection of the societal whole and its development;
- their subjective evaluations of their own conceptualizations;
- the current 'zeitgeist', i.e. hegemonic societal discourses, projects, or 'moods.'

From the subject's perspective, political orientations are not only *re*-constructive, in the sense of merely reconstructing and evaluating their distinct section of reality and the subjective, political conclusions they draw from it. Rather, political orientations also contain *con*-structive moments that create alternative sketches or models of societal contexts. Lest a determinism of societal conditions creep in through the back door, such models must be respected as the subject's active contributions, even though they may not be 'original' in a historical sense. Even young racists or right-wing extremists who might be in the headlines are not acting only *in* or *for* the Now. Racist or right-wing policies and practices also encompass societal models and proposals for solutions on social issues; it just so happens that, from our humanist perspective, their consequences are not acceptable. However, to be able to uncover in the empirical data relevant evidence of these models and proposals, we must first acknowledge in theory and investigate in praxis the potential references to society and the future.

It is barely worth mentioning that individual subjects refer to existing societal ideas, as examples, insights, and context for their own orientations and political designs. One can label the present, dominant discourses as racist, but such labeling does not represent a particularly insightful scientific finding. Rather, it represents a politically normative designation, a political position towards such discourses. It may also constitute a political campaign slogan

(Kampfbegriff) against such discourses - articulated from a position that rejects them because they imply the categorization of people and particular perspectives for the societal future.

Finally, it must be examined whether political orientations – such as racist ones - might not just mirror *real* relations and conditions in the world (and not ‘merely’ discourses *about* such conditions) - however distorted or broken such a ‘mirroring’ may appear in a specific empirical case. Specifically, we must investigate whether such racist, nationalist, ethnocentric positions may just describe observations of existing social relationships between real groups. If, for example, Germans perceive migrants as inferior, this stance corresponds to the reality of the social arrangement between Germans and migrants. It is not a mental construct or evidence of bad intentions by concrete Germans who see migrants as inferior: Not because migrants *are* ‘per se’ inferior, but because, in the very specific societal circumstances, migrants are indeed not equal to Germans. In the framework of *our* societies, racist or nationalist orientations are a perfectly ‘normal’ and ‘successful’, i.e., empirically correct, mirroring of *real* conditions. As Holzkamp observes, certain (political) ‘premises’ between historical groups “are accepted as self-evident prerequisites for action” (1994, p. 49). The ‘individual racist’ in Germany is well aware of the position they occupy in the historical division of the world. Still, they may not have much to say about it, partially because we do not live in social structures where ‘everyone’ (‘every Tom, Dick, and Harry’) is asked about social issues; partially because ‘I’ may simply not have something to say about everything in the world, even if the topic might be relevant for - and powerful over - my life.

Before we switch our perspective and move to our next step, let us summarize the effects of the new, the societal conditions on orientation:

- (Individual) orientation is no longer a purely individual task within the societal nexus of action.
- Societally produced meanings for orientation refer to a societally produced context of action.
- The intangible target called ‘societal conditions’ necessitates that orientation is mediated by (abstract) concepts.
- A reflexive baseline relationship between subject and the societal meanings for orientation is important. When analyzing orientations of individual subjects, the relevant levels of mediation and critique must be reconstructed each time to be able to investigate the respective social reference systems to which concrete orientations are aligned to.
- Within the new societal nexus, contradictoriness is a characteristic of societally produced meanings for orientation.
- For our analysis, we can distinguish between two qualitatively distinct modes of orientation: conventional/reproductive and resistant, constructive and transcendent.
- In our multifaceted action-theoretical understanding, we encounter *racism* on three different levels:
- First and foremost, it is a structuring moment of contested societal conditions/relations.

- Furthermore, we encounter racism in socially produced orientational meanings that are infused into, and negotiated within various discourses or theories about societal relations.
- Finally, we encounter racist arguments and justifications as components of individual subjects' action orientations. However, it is very difficult to imagine the political orientation of subjects' actions as 'easy', 'linear,' or somehow unambiguous. Subjective orientation in contradictory societal conditions is certainly not an easy or smooth affair! Racism is a moment of individual subjects' political orientation of action within their particular social position and situation and in their particular relationship to their world. With the help of racist meanings, subjects take a stance towards societal relations and plan and orient their actions within them.

IV. The perspective of psychology: Racism as deviance?

If we change the perspective on racism once more, we see that psychology, as a kind of collective subject, plays a part in this social nexus in a characteristic way. It becomes evident quite quickly that *social* phenomena such as racism, nationalism, etc., are met with disapproval; often, they are interpreted as *individual* dis-orientations or as individual lack of orientations. Social phenomena, such as racism, are too easily conceived as inadequate reactions, as individual deviations from developmental, cognitive, or social norms and standards. Terms like 'prejudice', 'bias', or 'stereotype' reflect this prevailing logic very well.

We see easily that, in its dominant way of dealing with social phenomena, psychology does not reflect the levels and levers of *mediation* between the overall societal nexus of life and individual action/orientation we have established thus far. Instead, psychology dominantly operates with *dichotomies*, usually 'normal' vs. 'deviant'; however, these are the very dichotomies psychology often creates itself! Additionally, (the discipline of) psychology likes to think of itself as a neutral, above-it-all evaluator of subjects. It apparently considers its special task and competence, its social mandate in demarcating or fabricating standards of normality. These constructed standards are then used to judge individual subjects.

Psychology, then...

- a) assigns individual subjects to discrete positions on a spectrum of 'normality' and 'deviance';
- b) decides on the necessary 'treatment' for diagnosed subjects;
- c) attempts to 'correct' or 'cure' diagnosed subjects;
- d) or goes as far as to propose their total exclusion.

It is, however, necessary to ask to what extent racisms - or nationalisms, sexism, and other social phenomena - can be understood as *deviations* from an ostensibly neutral political-scientific *norm*. Are they not rather *potential* political (*counter-*)*projects* that 'I' – psychologist, researcher - may not like or cannot accept because of *my own* political considerations, value decisions or my

customers' orders? To put it bluntly: Racism is not *false* consciousness, but a *specific* consciousness about the world (it is a certain form of 'world consciousness'). Just as anti-racism is not a scientifically *correct* consciousness, but a *specific* consciousness about the world (a certain form of 'world consciousness'). Both perspectives are based on differing values and competing ideas of how the world *ought to be*!

The disciplinary self-misunderstanding of being a supposedly neutral normality-judge solidifies in praxis the psychologization of social phenomena.⁸ However, this conceit is neither a coincidence nor a mistake of any one psychologist that could be remedied by scientific 'progress' and patient coaxing. Quite the opposite! In the context of psychology's contradictory societal functionality, the dichotomizing perspective on racism represents a very successful 'transfer service' for its application, its practice in society. Definitely, psychologization represents the translation of the disciplinary function of psychology into individual psychologists' praxis.

Since the beginning of the 20th century, the historical arrangement in our societies between societal power and social sciences (like psychology) consists in *not negotiating* the dominant social dis/order, but instead in treating 'it' through individual adaptation and repair, as well as through improvement, transformation, or exclusion of *individuals* (eventually also small groups). The historical 'deal' has since then consisted in the servility, the servitude of the social sciences in serving population politics – in serving "governmentality" to use M. Foucault's term. The services are provided in exchange for, or the promise of, wage labor or social prestige for the individual psychologist (social scientist). The dual societal function of the social sciences in this arrangement with power is best summarized with the catchphrase 'helping *and* controlling'.

V. Psychology's double function: entanglements, subject-positions, and (critical) psychology's interests and tasks

From a theoretical perspective that assigns also to '*non-academic*' individuals (racists or not) the equal ability to hold and articulate ideas about society and individuals, about the world and the future, psychology's scientific problem is not to decide whether it wants to play the salaried referee for the evaluation and judgment of behaviors and opinions of different individuals or groups. There is no special social-scientific task to define a line of demarcation between 'national identity' that is still acceptable and a level of 'nationalism' that must be condemned - even though social scientists usually like to understand their task as just that.

Rather, from our action-theoretical perspective on social phenomena, like racism, nationalism, etc., I see the scientific task for psychology in the reconstruction of the different standpoints, entanglements, interests, positions, and actions towards society, the individual, and the relationship between

⁸ For different levers of psychologization see Marvakis 2022.

individual and society (within the context of international structures of social inequality), and thus in rendering them comprehensible (as far as that is possible). Only such a reconstruction can clarify and justify these (ultimately political) positions - also vis-à-vis one's own clients or customers.

The identification and negotiation of one's own political orientations within the nexus of historical structural conflicts of our society enables us to identify the respective standpoints and interests of the involved subjects, as well as to reflect our own entanglement in this nexus – including, of course, the entanglement of psychology itself - in order to properly conceptualize these discrete entanglements.

The tension between politics and science, between political standpoint and scientific standpoint, cannot be eased by floating the researcher's or (the paying) client's own political stances and decisions above society like trans-historical balloons. Researchers or paying clients – like national bureaucracies or wealthy enough elites - cannot infuse their own assumptions and prospects of society, its structure and its future into theory as some anthropological measuring bars or yardsticks above social reality. Rather, these assumptions are themselves (politically and subjectively) grounded and interest-driven proposals of how the world is and in which direction it should develop. Empirically documented articulations of researched human 'objects' may contain political (counter-)proposals of which the researcher-subject might not approve due to their own (probably) well-grounded political considerations and value decisions. Nevertheless, such (counter-)proposals cannot simply be conceptualized as deviations from the scientist's own assumptions about what constitutes normality – with all the consequences for the 'holders' of the 'deviant' stances.

Even in the case of racism, nationalism, sexism, etc., it is necessary to ask whence 'our' (psychologists') ostensibly scientific-anthropological certainty arises that leads us to consider *disliked* political orientations as *scientifically* wrong. This is even more surprising when we consider that social equality and inequality, the overall societal reference of such -isms, represent only potential, *possible* human societal conditions. Social equality is still much more a future *project* in and for our societies than social reality. Whether orientations of inequality or equality prevail in society is not a matter of the scientific justification of the untenability of one (social) design by representatives of the other; rather, it is a consequence of the political struggle of (societal) opposites and political actors. Thus, the fact that people are nationalistic, racist or sexist in their thinking or actions does not constitute a deviation from some scientific norm simply because the researchers of these empirical phenomena come from a completely different political position. Both racist and anti-racist orientations are designs and concepts for people's social coexistence, and in the course of history, must prevail through collective learning processes (Klaus Eder 1985) or/and through class struggle.

Racism, nationalism, sexism, etc. are structural pillars in our societies, articulating existing power relations. These power relations emerge in political struggles; however, in those struggles, not all participants have to advocate for, nor 'believe' in, racism, nationalism, sexism, etc. Participation in society and its

structures always includes individual, subjective contributions to 'things' - conditions and developments -, but it does not always presuppose that one has a 'personal opinion' about or be an advocate of such 'things.'

The differentiation of racism (nationalism, sexism, etc.), a) as a structural moment in the organization of our societies, b) as a socially produced orientational meaning for us, and c) as an individual, subjective orientation signifies also a new quality for the responsibility held by subjects. If 'I' am responsible for my own (racist, etc.) intentions, motives, and orientations, 'I' am now also responsible for the consequences and effects of my (non-racist) (non-)actions in the superordinate societal nexus of activity.⁹ Consequently, in the societal nexus of life, we are encountering an expansion, a 'de-moralization' (or de-ethicalization) and 'de-psychologization' of subjects' responsibility for action.

Our description of the mediation between the societal nexus of life and individual orientations intends to clarify that racist, antisemitic, or other political orientation is possible - and powerful in society - in individual action, even without sharing any racist, antisemitic or other subjectively grounded orientation. In this action-theoretical approach, 'we' are participating in antisemitism, racism etc. (as structural moments of our societies) without – necessarily – 'advocating' racism, antisemitism, etc. And it is this 'de-psychologization' of subjects' action that is opening up new tasks for social-scientific analysis of political orientations.

Social-scientific analysis is not promoted (solely) by the detection of racist (or antisemitic, etc.) orientations in the subjects and the diagnosis of it as a distorted, stereotypical perception, a 'misperception of interests,' or other individual shortcomings. Rather, the scientific task consists now in surfacing the multi-layered mediations and levers, the '*political grammar*' of our actions and its multifaceted orientational background, so that these orientations can become transparent, conscious and communicable. From the perspective of the individual subjects, the *responsibilities* for their actions are located precisely in these mediations and their respective social *contexts*. What we need is knowledge production that does not bisect individual subjects into objects. Rather, we need to see the researched individuals as subjects who anticipate, plan, dream, and consider - in other words: as acting individuals. As subjects we are neither limited to being deviants from some conventional and powerful norms of functionality nor forced to align with the political positions held by the researcher or their bureaucratic clients.

In summary, the task of (a critical) psychology is to contribute to the reconstruction and critique of the prevalent terminology and concepts with all their powerful implications – *particularly* those employed by psychologists themselves. This reconstruction and critique is interested not so much in the individual subjects and their 'inner life' as in the available and used ideas and orientational meanings about society, the individual, and the relationship between individual and society that are *implied* in such concepts. The relationship between individual and society is not an a-historical, static 'essence' that only needs to be excavated. Rather, the relationship between individual and society,

⁹ This is distinct from the differences between 'institutional racism' and so-called 'individual racism,' which encompasses immediate, brutal forms of social interaction.

itself, is a developing moment of the socio-historical process, in which society, the individuals, and their mutual relationship undergo substantial development and change. It is only through such a process of discernment that we can clarify the various *standpoints* and subjects' *positionings* in the concrete societal fabric and render them communicable and negotiable - not by reproducing blindly the assigned positions of *assessor vs. client*, with all its unequal power differentials, but as political subjects who are engaged in struggles for the allocation of social resources within the soci(et)al order.

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Gender, Women and Critical Feminisms

Community care, practices of resilience and resistance among women in the *La Araucanía* Region

Alba Zambrano Constanzo & Maria Antonieta Campos Melo

Abstract

Chile is a country with significant social inequalities, largely attributed to an extremely liberal economic model (García y Pérez, 2017). These inequalities are expressed with particular harshness in the La Araucanía region, where human development indicators reveal substantial gaps compared to other Chilean regions. High poverty rates and various challenges related to access to basic rights are prevalent in the region. Women are the main group affected by this situation, especially indigenous women living in rural areas. This happens due to the social structure that places them in conditions of greater social and economic vulnerability, while also leaving them responsible for the care of children, adolescents, and elderly people, thus imposing a high burden on them.

This article analyzes the trajectories of organized women and female leaders of neighborhoods with social vulnerability, and of indigenous communities in the La Araucanía region of Chile. The study identifies the forms that their organization and leadership strategies take in contexts marked by patriarchal and colonial relations, social adversity and violence. The stories of women from urban and rural areas were collected through individual and group interviews, as well as participant observation. From this, life trajectories, social organization, community leadership and empowerment processes were analyzed from the perspective of community psychology and Latin American feminism. From a political approach, power relations in everyday life are analyzed, as well as the relationships established with public policy programs and the local government to claim rights and influence decision-making.

Common mechanisms are identified among women who move from life experiences marked by a lack of opportunities and patriarchal and structural violence, to forms of solidarity organization, mutual support, community care and struggle for their rights. It is concluded that there are forms of community leadership and organization that reflect the legacy of relationships among women, adopting counter-cultural profiles that allow sustaining life and bonds in realities strained by patriarchal and state violence.

Keywords

community leadership, community care, resilience, resistance, resilience

Introduction

Human beings are the most vulnerable and fragile species, requiring interaction and care from others throughout our existence in order to stay alive and develop, especially in the earliest stages. Care is organized socially, involving the family, community and a diversity of institutions, including the State. Nevertheless, the socio-cultural construction has eliminated care as an articulating axis of social and economic life. It is understood as part of the so-called reproductive economy, a dimension subordinated to the productive economy, and therefore made invisible. It implies work that is not recognized, valued, or paid. It is fundamentally carried out by women, especially in the private sphere of the family (Cantilo, Lleopart y Ezquerro, 2018).

Gender studies have shown how the tasks that take place in the domestic sphere are essential for the functioning of the economic system and for the social well-being of people. Women, in various social and cultural spaces, have oriented themselves from and towards the care of others, playing a preponderant role even in situations that do not meet the conditions for the respect of human rights. They do this by assigning a central role to bonds, helping to sustain the lives of others through daily care. A set of social and economic transformations, as well as the succession of various crises, have led to the questioning of care as a mission that is solely and exclusively for women. We currently face different, interconnected and overlapping crises that threaten not only individual and social well-being, but also the very sustainability of the planet and our lives on it (Kagan, Akhurst, Alfaro, Lawthom, Richards y Zambrano, 2022). These multiple crises (economic, political, sociocultural and ecological) result in the resurgence of authoritarian, nationalist, and xenophobic populist politics worldwide. Additionally, we face a clear decrease in social equity and a concentration of power and resources in the hands of a minority.

The expansion of neoliberal policies, together with the reduction of public investment in social services, has dramatically decreased the presence of the public sector, affecting the availability of common goods for citizens, especially for those disadvantaged or excluded. Other processes, such as increased life expectancy and demographic ageing, the massive incorporation of women into the labor market (Galv  z y Rodr  guez-Modro  o, 2016) and the erosion of community as an active agent in the exchange of care, and therefore the individualisation of risk, have led to a strong crisis of care.

In different contexts and realities, it becomes evident that care for people and their environments is not enough to guarantee human development, so we must rethink the foundations on which sustaining is organised in a broader sense (Vega, Mart  nez y Paredes, 2018). Consequently, care is not currently a central aspect of public policies, socioeconomic debates, or collective reflection. Furthermore, recent crises have once again highlighted the lack of democratisation of care, not only within families, but also in the broader community.

Feminism has emphasised the need to revalue and redistribute care work, which entails assuming care as a collective responsibility that must underpin the

construction of a fairer and more democratic society. Reality shows us that women continue to have a predominant role at different stages of the life cycle, as well as in situations of illness and adversity affecting family members. This aspect of care, which is typically private, made invisible, and of lower social value, is strongly linked to an impact on the paid labor market, where women continue to be in a more precarious situation than men due to their responsibilities in the reproductive sphere, among other reasons. The data is compelling in showing how the burden of care is associated with lower pay and a more fragile contractual situation, which leads to the feminization of poverty (Cantilo, Lleopart y Ezquerria; 2018).

Providing care involves attending to individuals and the contexts in which they develop. Since these care activities are made possible through various arrangements involving different social actors and entities, it is relevant in contemporary societies to problematise the relationship between the State, the market, communities and families, and their articulated capacity to constitute effective systems for the provision of care (Vega, Martínez y Paredes, 2018).

Given the relevance of care for the sustenance and development of individuals, and in order to eradicate social inequalities with regard to both those who receive care and those who bear the responsibility of providing it, it is necessary that care be taken as a collective responsibility. To achieve this, societies must establish a social organization for political action on this matter (Cantilo, Lleopart y Ezquerria; 2018). In this sense, the politicisation of care is proposed by feminisms as a key aspect to move forward. This means that care should become an object of public policy, to address the social inequalities that cause the reproduction of life to be a subordinate dimension to the productive dimension, a substantive issue of a capitalist and patriarchal society. Care is a right and it must be guaranteed and therefore managed collectively.

Community Care in Times of Crisis

In different contexts of precariousness and in various crises, especially in Latin America, diverse responses arise to confront basic needs. Communities create survival and resistance strategies that take on different forms depending on the characteristics of these, the nature of the crises, how weakened the care systems are, and how much actual presence the state and local systems have in them. According to Vega-Solis (2019), care provided by networks of neighborhoods and solidarity, which are often made invisible, take on heterogeneous expressions and are commonly the result of hybrid processes between family, community, the State and the market. Some of the collective actions that can be observed are the following: communal pots, health brigades, provision of food baskets, among many others (Zambrano, Chacón, Sanhueza y Campos, 2022).

Although these forms of care are made visible in periods of greater crises or natural disasters (Rivera, Velázquez y Morete, 2014), they are based on more stable mechanisms of articulation that allow sustaining daily life in contexts of limited access to resources. These psychosocial processes are woven through the

trajectories of these communities in everyday life, in relationships of support, mutual aid, and solidarity. They are built from a shared history, a common space, and a social identity that is configured over time. Therefore, although care may become more visible in periods of acute crisis, the shared experience in a matrix of adverse life and limited opportunities shows us creative mechanisms of resistance and resilience, where care among members plays a relevant role.

In these spaces, women play a fundamental role in sustaining life despite the precariousness they themselves face, providing community care and making it possible. The community networks they create are evident both in everyday life and in those events that are a turning point, but which undoubtedly also contain the most stable conditions of exclusion, lack of opportunities and limitations for development. In this way, critical events such as disasters or pandemics are only a more acute expression of the permanent crisis situation faced by communities and can be taken as a kind of “analyser” (Rodríguez-Villasante, 2007) of the structure of exclusion and oppression that they face. Likewise, it can help to make visible the roles that women play on a daily basis, when they do not have the prominence and appreciation they may adopt in crises.

Various experiences arise as resistance, not only reactive to the current crisis, but as an established response to the historical relationship of coloniality (Lugones, 2003) that marginalized communities on our continent have organized for generations. These experiences invite us to legitimize everyday collective knowledge, the management capacity of community leaderships, and to make it part of the practical knowledge about public issues, or about how to face them.

The Crisis of Care Systems in Chile

In Chile, the current institutional and economic model has been at the service of maintaining privileges for an elite. The concentration of wealth in a small group has always been present in the history of the country and during the 17 years of dictatorship (1973-1990), conditions were generated to increase the distance between social groups. During this period, a set of economic measures were implemented that laid the foundations for the establishment of the neoliberal model. Privatisation, economic liberalisation, deregulation, state subsidiarity, opening to international competition, and labor flexibility became part of the mechanisms that radically transformed the country. The implementation of the model resulted in a redesign of the boundaries between the market and the State, generating profound transformations among social groups (Araujo, Marinho y Campêlo, 2017). This model favored the accumulation of power and wealth within small groups, generating a subordination of politics to this economic elite that has consolidated in Chile (Contardo, 2020).

In terms of social and economic policies, a liberal model prevails, characterized by an accelerated shift from the State to private provision of services, particularly in health, education and pensions. It is also informal due to the strong presence of unofficial protection mechanisms, where families and social networks play a fundamental role (Arriagada, 2010). As in the rest of Latin

America, the organization of care in Chile is of a mixed nature. This means that it can be carried out by public and private organizations, and it takes place both inside and outside of households and families (Arraigada, 2010).

The weakening of co-responsibility, the privatisation of care, and a less prominent role of the state, along with the tensions generated by various crises, have led the country to face a profound care crisis. The most affected are women, in different aspects of life. This situation was aggravated by the COVID-19 pandemic. Some evidence of these impacts has been provided by studies conducted in the country during the first period of the health crisis.

For example, the MOVID 19 report (National Monitoring of COVID-19 Symptoms and practices in Chile, 2020) points out that 42% of women are caregivers of others, a task they must simultaneously reconcile with other duties (a situation known as the triple workday). In comparison, while 22% of women have increased their daily care workload by more than eight hours, only 13% of men have done so. The gender gap for the rest of household tasks (such as cooking, cleaning, shopping, among others) is similar, intensifying women's workload. On the other hand, the study "Radiography of the Zero Man," carried out by the UC Centre for Surveys and Longitudinal Studies, in conjunction with UN Women and the Ministry of Women and Gender Equity of Chile, revealed that, during the first months of the pandemic, 71% of men had dedicated zero weekly hours to help their children in school homework (Bravo, Castillo y Hughes, 2020).

Before the pandemic, figures had been equally concerning. According to the CASEN survey conducted in 2017, 19.4% of Chilean women over 15 years old were out of the workforce due to caregiving or household tasks, while only 0.6% of men were inactive for these reasons.

In productive labor, inequalities are similar, given that women face limitations to access the paid labor market. 33.9% of women declare having to perform family duties, such as unpaid domestic and care work in their homes, as the main reason for not entering the labour market (INE, 2018).

All areas linked to care, activities that had been devalued and made invisible, became vital during this period of crisis. Most of these activities have been under the responsibility of women, particularly those who share less advantaged living situations.

Resistance and Resilience: Facing Adversity on a Daily Basis

Social sciences incorporated the term 'resilience' starting in the 1980s to describe individuals who are capable of having a healthy psychological development despite living in high-risk contexts, such as environments of poverty, multi-problematic families, prolonged stressful situations, among other circumstances (Uriarte, 2010). Resilience is the capability that individuals have of confronting extreme situations and overcoming them. Thanks to resilience, individuals are not only capable of facing challenging moments in life, but also of emerging

stronger and with new insights. It is a process that demands flexibility to confront difficult experiences in order to successfully navigate adversity.

Although the concept originally emerged to describe an individual capacity, it has later been extended to also refer to family groups or collectives that are capable of minimizing and overcoming the detrimental effects of adversity and of disadvantaged and socio-culturally deprived contexts. These groups are able to recover after suffering traumatic experiences, such as natural disasters, epidemics, deportation, civil wars, concentration camps, among others (Rutter, 1993). Individuals undergo positive transformations after the experience of crisis. This includes processes of regeneration, reorientation, personal reorganisation and openness to new opportunities that arise as a result of the crisis (Olabegoya, 2006).

The concept of resistance can be understood as the personal or collective strength to stand firm in the face of adversity, the capacity to remain intact when facing a setback, or to endure a difficult situation. That is, to be able to live and develop normally in a high-risk environment that generates material damage and stress (Uriarte, 2010). Moreover, especially in those spaces of the world that have faced profound and ongoing processes of colonization and coloniality, the concept takes on a particular meaning. For subordinate or marginalized peoples or groups, this strength represents not only a way to confront crises with determination, but also involves the capacity to resist, tolerate or oppose. From a cultural perspective, it refers to the process of systematic opposition to a homogenizing assimilation and to claim the right to make decisions about their own resources (Morales, 1993).

Community Female Leaders: Amid Adversity, Resilience and Resistance

In what follows, we will present some partial results from studies conducted by the authors of this article in the La Araucanía region in Chile. These findings enable us to analyze the role of female leaders in community care, both in urban and rural areas. In analyzing these results, we hope to find clues to understanding the mechanisms of such care and how women develop practices of resilience and resistance. These practices allow them to become caregivers for others, despite their harrowing experiences. Furthermore, we aim to highlight the limitations of a care system that is exclusively sustained by women within the spaces of family and community, in a context where social injustice and patriarchal violence reproduce and justify inequalities, without any systematic action taken by the state to advance in matters of social and gender justice.

The first study is part of a broader research aimed at characterizing the psychosocial community dynamics associated with community strengthening in different neighborhoods of Chile and Brazil. Specifically, we focus on the leadership exercise of women living in neighborhoods that face conditions of vulnerability. We hope to reveal how female leaders deploy leadership within the community framework, with a strong emphasis on caring for the members of the communities, particularly those who live in a more disadvantaged social, cultural

and economic situation. We seek to analyze the characteristics and conditions under which social leadership is exercised by women in urban communities facing social and economic vulnerability. This study has been conducted in three neighborhoods in Temuco, using a Participatory Action Research approach. Mixed methods have been used, including participant observation, interviews, participatory workshops, surveys, ongoing feedback, among others.

The neighbourhoods were established in the 1980s under conditions of significant precarity, initially lacking basic services. People had to organize themselves in order to improve their living conditions. During this period, community bonds of mutual aid were strengthened, and some community grassroots organizations emerged. Once these improvements were achieved, it was particularly the adults and elderly individuals who maintained a strong sense of community and continued to engage in varying levels of participation and neighbourhood organization.

In the three neighborhoods under study, the pandemic had a significant impact on neighborhood bonds, blurring community organizations to a different extent. Territorial organizations (such as neighborhood associations) directed their efforts towards addressing basic needs of support and care, through their leaders' actions. Female leaders are mainly between 40 and 70 years old, with a strong commitment to their organizations. They strive to achieve aims that primarily focus on securing resources for collective spaces, organizing activities and providing support to those facing greater challenges.

Their life narratives are marked by experiences of abuse, discrimination, mistreatment, and a lack of access to resources to meet their basic needs, that is, adverse life trajectories characterised by limited opportunities for development. As they point out, they have endured various forms of violence, related to social class, discrimination, stigma, gender, and domestic violence. Their trajectories are marked by traumatic experiences, stories of effort, and assuming responsibilities -often at a young age- in caring for younger siblings and sick family members.

I tell all my children that I love them... because I was never told that myself. (TSMVSE_V4).

They currently face a significant caregiving burden, both objectively and subjectively, as they are responsible for the care of their children, partners, parents, mothers-in-law, grandchildren, sick people, among others. Domestic labor has been the main activity for most of them, though they have pursued other parallel occupations to support or fully meet their household's financial needs. These additional activities include sewing, knitting, working as domestic employees, engaging in recycling activities, and preparing and selling jam and other food.

You become everything: a mum, a psychologist, a nurse, a shoulder to cry on. We do it all (TSMVSE_V3).

Everyone expects so much from us: as housewives, as mums, as wives... In the end, you are there for everyone, except for yourself (TSMVSE_V6).

Having been raised in a patriarchal culture and with a strong Christian influence, they predominantly exhibit a traditional view of women's role. Only some of them analyze their experiences from a more critical perspective, identifying the effects of patriarchy and seeking to change their roles and even their own gender identity.

Most of the female leaders stand out for their ability to serve as intermediaries between the "community world," where horizontal bonds and collectivity prevail, and the State. Particularly during times of crisis, they are the ones who concentrate efforts to assist those in greater need, demanding support from different state entities for the community members who need it the most. During the pandemic, female leaders had a predominant role in maintaining bonds of mutual support, and in re-articulating community relationships when the emergency situation subsided.

Neighborhood female leaders have significant skills and expertise in engaging with local political actors, through which they were able to manage and obtain support during the pandemic (such as food baskets, medical supplies, etc.) for community members facing economic woes. However, the presence of the State during this period was low, limited to providing some basic resources. Women leaders have learned to build networks with various agents of local public policy, as well as politicians from different political and partisan positions. Their priority is to secure the necessary resources for their communities.

They take on a mediating role with the State, strategically advocating for resources for their respective organizations and neighborhoods. This mirrors their experience in household management, where they have learnt to deal with scarce resources and to mobilize opportunities in a creative way.

The levels of prominence of women in community leadership vary across different territories, but there is a common thread regarding care ethics. Although they did not experience sufficient care during their childhood and adolescence, most of them facing gender violence, they develop a narrative and take actions of care for others. They explicitly state that they "don't want others to live through what they had to," hence, their efforts are focused on expanding opportunities for others.

In addition to the burden they experience within their households, they also face various duties from their organizations. They have to invest a considerable amount of time in dealing with different authorities or professionals in public policy, as well as in organizing and implementing activities. They lack support from other community members in carrying out these tasks, making it challenging to fulfil their commitments, assignments and initiatives.

We could point out that leadership, in addition to projecting the role of caring for others (as a traditional gender role), constitutes a practice that enables them to integrate their difficult life experiences, their lessons, and to leverage them for the common welfare. In this case, only some women hold a more critical perspective of reality, identifying structural conditions that affect their life situations and those of their communities. We could argue that there are clear

trajectories of resilience, but culturally, there is scarce resistance to economic and socio-cultural conditions.

The second study is focused on political trajectories through a biographical approach of *Mapuche Lafkenche* women from the communes of Tirúa, Saavedra and Toltén. Twelve female leaders of different ages (between 27 and 70), who belong to community organizations participate in this study. One of the participants holds a position of political representation in the municipal council of her commune. In the La Araucanía region, the *Lafkenche* territory is a predominantly rural area. As all the territories ancestrally inhabited by the *Mapuche* People, it has a long trajectory of dispossession and colonization that has shaped the lives of its inhabitants. It has configured a particular local history of resistance and negotiation with the State and Chilean Society.



Lafkenche territory between the communes of Tirúa and Toltén.
Source: Own elaboration

According to the National Institute of Statistics (INE, 2017), the current population in the communes of Saavedra, Tirúa and Toltén who identify as belonging to the *Mapuche* people is 80.6%, 70.6% and 43.1%, respectively. With

regard to communal poverty rates, the 2017 CASEN survey indicates percentages of 35.8% in Saavedra, 35.1% in Toltén and 26.8% in Tirúa. It is important to highlight that in Saavedra there has been a significant increase in the leadership of women in community organizations. Currently, 57% of these organizations are led by women, and 20% of them are exclusively composed of women (own data).

From analyzing the narratives, it can be concluded that in the trajectories of the interviewed *Mapuche Lafkenche* women there is an intersection of oppressions at play. Stories of abuse and discrimination emerge strongly. These forms of violence are present in the various spheres of their lives, including their own family, community, school and workplace. Their life stories reveal a chain of consistently violent events and conditions such as extreme poverty, mistreatment, sexual abuse, forced migration, discrimination, gender-based violence, among others. This has the background of the historical trauma of the indigenous people to which they belong, characterized by a long process of colonisation and coloniality that subjects them to a set of the experiences in which their culture is made invisible, marginalized and excluded.

The study evidences different forms of violence, such as direct violence (psychological, economic and sexual abuse), symbolic violence (derogatory treatment based on cultural, economic and gender reasons) and structural violence (multiple deprivations, lack of access to basic services, limited opportunities for development, among others). Additionally, their socialization conveys a model of womanhood based on domestic labor and family care. As *Mapuche* female leaders, part of their management involves not transgressing cultural norms, because they represent their people. Therefore, a different women's role is evidently not allowed.

It is noteworthy that early on in their life trajectories, they have to assume the role of family caregivers. On the one hand, this becomes an obstacle to their own development as women, but, on the other hand, it serves as a catalyst for leadership, as they consider caregiving as a personal commitment to collective reparation. This is reflected in the following quote:

I ended up playing the role of being the mum, taking care of my little sisters, my brother, and working for them, because we had no food. (BLB1)

This set of adverse experiences compels them to develop resilience from a young age. They acquire resources to confront these situations, as well as a functioning style that enables them to detach themselves from violent and adverse events, and to project themselves towards the future. Among the various resilience strategies they exhibit, we would like to highlight the following: engaging in uncomfortable conversations to directly confront conflicts; migrating to leave behind abuse and mistreatment and to seek new sources of income and learning; acquiring new trades and skills; becoming mothers, teaching and transmitting their own experiences to their children; establishing meaningful connections with those in positions of authority in their workplaces; learning *mapudungün* (the *Mapuche* People language); strengthening a legacy conveyed as a destiny-mission; sacralising examples of parents and/or significant people;

acknowledging their own capacities and potentialities; exercising leadership as a means of healing and redefining their past, among others.

Leadership emerges within this framework precisely as an expression of the resilience process. The exercise of community leadership serves as a way to keep with the dedication to caring for others, as well as a practice of resilience that strategically enables them to access resources that allow them to contribute to the well-being of others.

I came back again and it was good; by then I had personality, because before... with all the shouting I got at home, I was about to go under the table. And then I had personality, and it was good for me, very good. Now I can stand up for myself, I can talk, I won't stay silent, and that was very good for me (BE1S).
I love being a leader. To be there helping people and especially women, because for Mapuche women... Life hasn't been easy for Mapuche women. Like my calling that makes me be a leader (TE1A).

Service to others has allowed them to legitimize themselves, engaging in tasks that align with cultural mandates of womanhood in *Mapuche* society and culture. At the same time, the exercise of leadership means a liberation from the socio-cultural and structural determinants coming from both the national society and the *Mapuche* world. Leadership provides a platform from which they can redefine their traumatic and painful experiences. In this sense, leadership emerges as a life organizer for female leaders. Finally, there is a third dimension that mobilizes leadership, which is accepting a legacy, a learning process coming from their lineage (*kupalme*). This implies assuming a commitment to *Mapuche* culture and identity, this time from a renewed standpoint.

The motivational factors vary from one leader to another, but the community perspective is present in all of them. Their commitment to improving the lives of others drives them to engage in the task of mediating and managing opportunities that enable them to access resources they do not possess.

When analyzing the processes of empowerment, we can conclude that the interviewees' processes transcend the individual level, as their leadership is based on solidarity, social organization and cooperation. They contribute to the empowerment of their organizations and communities, promoting unity around collective goals rather than individual differences.

In an integrative view of both studies, we can conclude that the empowerment of female leaders in both cases occurs through the interaction of personal conditions and the social, cultural and political context where their leadership has developed. From that interaction, and from their personal characteristics, among which their socio-emotional resources stand out, the female leaders develop an ability to understand and manage the environment, threats, and also opportunities. This capacity emerges fundamentally from their own life stories, marked by ongoing adversity and the development of resilience as a strategy to deal with multiple challenges.

In the case of most *Mapuche* female leaders, there is also an evident capacity for socio-political analysis, strongly connected to their cultural identity and the ability to value or revalue their cultural roots and perceive reality from a

broader perspective. This is made possible through the cultural vitalization experienced by themselves and part of their communities, as well as the opportunity to have lived for some period of their lives in different cultural spaces. This life between worlds, whether educational, professional, and/or rural-urban migration experiences, enables them to acknowledge the value of their own culture, while also incorporating resources and strategies to negotiate culturally with the dominant society. We observe in this case a combination of resilience and resistance, which enables them to represent the aspirations of their communities and people, and navigate the institutional system of the State, in order to gain access to resources and opportunities to contribute to improving the living conditions of their communities.

The strategic reading of opportunities, for both groups of female leaders, primarily occurs within the context of public policies oriented towards women in conditions of vulnerability (particularly impoverished and indigenous women). In the case of *Mapuche* female leaders, their position of defending and promoting their culture emerges within a context of increasing recognition and revitalization of cultural heritage in recent decades. In both cases, participation is initially functional, though it enables them to develop a critical perspective as they gain experience in social organization and leadership. Above all, they develop a strategic understanding of their environment, advancing in access to power. However, a significant portion of their leadership actions is still directed towards managing resources rather than directly claiming rights.

As an empowerment exercise, female leaders, especially *Mapuche* women, manage to critically analyze their context; they establish connections between different dimensions and they acknowledge structural injustice. However, their everyday leadership actions do not directly aim to subvert these structural conditions; their proposal is to strategically manage the resources of the environment to improve living conditions. On the other hand, they maintain a traditional view of the role of women and of *Mapuche* women, without critically questioning this role.

Conclusions

Women's leadership in the community sphere is oriented towards sustaining life in the most adverse conditions. From their own life trajectories, marked by experiences of surviving multiple violence and intersecting oppressions, female leaders develop the capacity of resilience that enables them to grow in their own lives and also to exercise leadership oriented towards others. They are sensitive to the needs and potentialities of their communities.

Their living conditions as women that have been marginalized from opportunities for development (because of being poor, indigenous or rural women) enable them to guide the well-being of their communities in a more relevant and heart-felt manner. Paradoxically, the socialization they have received from a patriarchal culture enables them (better than men) to understand the needs and pains of others. They maintain a relational approach that

interconnects them deeply with the experiences and needs of the members of their communities.

Their leadership is, at least partially, countercultural because they participate despite being denied the right to do so, mainly due to discrimination based on gender, class and race. They gain spaces to access resources and decision-making, in a format that is different from the leadership styles prominent among men. They are oriented towards the common good, they place an emphasis on the relationships of solidarity and mutual aid, and they prioritize those who live in more disadvantaged conditions.

Female leaders overflow the State, as they use public policies directed towards marginalized women to engage in public affairs that were previously denied to women. They exercise a mediating role in those places and spaces where the State fails to reach due to its detachment and verticality, especially during periods of heightened crises.

It is important to acknowledge that in the Chilean context, especially in rural areas, female leaders interconnect communities with the State and other entities. Without their involvement, many resources and support would not reach the groups that have been more excluded from the protection systems. They act as a bridge that enables the precarious care systems to operate on a logic of territorial and affective proximity. Moreover, they boost these care systems by interconnecting community life with other spaces that are difficult to access for the community members.

We would like to highlight that female leaders are true models in intercultural dialogue. *Mapuche* female leaders, in particular, demonstrate their ability to establish connections between different cultures.

It is important to consider that although community plays a crucial role in fostering self-organization, socialization and providing close care, in reality, we observe that women play a central role in boosting these processes. However, we understand that the State is still essential to promote, support and complement community experiences, but this has to occur respecting their logics, resources and particularities. Its public function consists in providing public goods that guarantee the universality of control over the material and affective-relational conditions of our existence.

The care crisis must be addressed with public policies and community management, using strategies that dismantle patriarchal, capitalist and colonialist logics. There needs to be complementarity between public policies that guarantee access to basic rights, and public policies that aim at collective rights within the context of a democratic state. Such a State should promote and ensure effective participation, social organization and the strengthening of community networks for social and territorial justice. Female leaders are strategic allies in these purposes, as they hold a comprehensive understanding of the collective responsibility that caregiving entails. They take on community care with a profound sense of the common good.

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Mothers and warriors: Constructing feminine militancy and normalizing violence in Greek neo-Nazi media

Marianthi Anastasiadou

Abstract

Although women's militancy and the image of the woman-warrior are often idealized in the far-right and while the stereotype of men's monopoly in far-right violence has been strongly criticized during the last decades, little attention has been paid on the role violence plays as an ideological element in the construction of feminine far-right identities. However, the question of ideology is crucial for understanding the context of not only broader politicization of violence in far-right movements but also women's particular politicization to violence. Representations of violence in relation to femininity in the far-right can shed light on neglected ideological aspects of the - indeed contradictory regarding gender dynamics - political context in which women (are called upon to) mobilize and take action. The case of Greek neo-Nazi party of Golden Dawn and the discourses through which the party and its women have articulated a collective feminine identity is a characteristic example of how far-right femininity can be infused with references to violence. This aspect of Golden Dawn femininity has remained mostly invisible, although women members have not only often invoked hate and violence, but some have been even convicted for participation in or facilitation of violent crimes. Here I ask: how has violence been represented in Golden Dawn discourse and what has its role been in the articulation of gendered and in particular feminine collective political identities? How has potential feminine militancy been constructed in media discourse of the party and its' women?

Analysis of digital media content of Golden Dawn party and mostly its' women's organization, Women's Front, shows that by drawing on national and international, historical and contemporary, racist and nationalist discourses, violence occupies a central position in women's discourse, bearing strong gendered connotations. In specific, femininity is articulated in relation to a narrative of racial wars, illustrated through gendered images of internal and external dangers, while white feminine militancy is constructed as a twofold solution: both reproductive and soldierly. Thus, not only motherhood, but also martial readiness and war competence are praised as *sine qua non* aspects of an 'original' Greek, white womanhood – a dimension of women's politicization and participation in far-right movements and violence often ignored.

Keywords

far-right violence, far-right ideology, far-right women, femininity, nationalism, motherhood, female warriors

Introduction: far-right violence, women and the question of ideology

The relation between violence and women/femininity in the far-right¹ is still a thorny topic, although during the last decades there has been a vivid discussion on the role of women both in historical fascism and in contemporary far-right groups, parties and movements (e.g. Bacchetta & Power, 2002; Passmore 2003; Köttig et al., 2017; Dubslaff, 2022). Focusing on women's overlooked agency, feminist research has strongly criticized the long dominant interpretation of violence as a men's monopole and women's role as victims or only passive bystanders (Bitzan et al., 2003). The trial of Beate Zschäpe, accused for participation in neo-Nazi terrorist group NSU (National Socialist Underground), which committed the murders of nine people of immigrant origin and one policewoman as well as several bomb attacks and bank robberies in Germany from the late 1990s up to 2011, is a good example of how this discussion revived during the last years – the trial lasted from 2013 to 2018. Beate Zschäpe, founding member and held responsible for organization and logistics of the group, denied her central role, representing herself as an innocent, dependent and unhappy woman, basically as a victim of her two basic accomplices, Uwe Mundlos and Uwe Böhnhardt². In the meanwhile, and as it became clear that NSU functioned with the support of a broader network, other far-right women who testified in the same trial, represented themselves as ignorant, unpolitical subjects or even caring mothers, as if that was a proof of good citizenship (Dauber, 2014; Köttig, 2017). More recently, several women were among the prosecuted for the violent siege of USA Capitol in Washington D.C., which took place on the 6th of January 2021, following Trump's defeat in the presential election of 2020 (Matfess & Margolin, 2022). The attack, which resulted in several people injured and some dead, was organized and conducted by far-right

¹ I use the term 'far-right' in a loose way to refer to movements, groups and parties inspired by fascist, nationalist and authoritarian forces and ideas of the past, which can however depict different forms of representation and organization today. 'Far-right' can be seen as an umbrella term for 'radical-right', 'extreme-right', 'neo-fascism' and 'right-wing populism' (Mudde, 2019). Especially in relation to fascism, it is strongly debated today to what extent and which contemporary far-right parties and movements could be categorized as 'neo-fascist' (Griffin, 2018). On the one hand, there are political movements and groups that refer to historical fascism in an explicit way and copy narratives and methods from the historical tradition of fascism, like for example Golden Dawn does with Nazis. On the other hand, many far-right parties and groups distance themselves from historical 'fascism' today, although fascist ideas and practices from the past may inspire or influence their ideology and practices.

² In May 2023, Zschäpe admitted some responsibility for NSU crimes, although in a controversial way. During a new hearing in court, she argued that she could have stopped her accomplices but she did not, now regretting about it - without, however, taking the responsibility for her active role in supporting and co-organizing the crimes of the group. See: Vor bayerischem Untersuchungsausschuss: Zschäpe räumt Mitschuld an NSU-Mordserie deutlich ein. 23.05.2023. *Tagespiegel*. <https://www.tagesspiegel.de/politik/vor-bayerischem-untersuchungsausschuss-zschape-raumt-mitschuld-an-nsu-mordserie-deutlich-ein-9859592.html>

supporters of Trump during the process of vote-counting by the Congress and formalization of the election result which gave victory to Trump's opponent, Joe Biden. Women, who constituted 13% of the individuals charged with involvement in the siege, participated in the attack in several ways: from violent action on the spot to inciting violence through social media. Although the number of women participants is definitely smaller than that of men, some women took even leading roles in organizing the siege and in breaking into the Capitol, which represents a change of paradigm on women's participation in far-right violence, according to Matfess & Margolin (2022). Still, they denied responsibility in court using their gender as proof of innocence, so as to avoid legal consequences. Considering the legendary trial of neo-Nazi party Golden Dawn in Greece, which took place between 2015 and 2020 in Athens and brought sixty-eight members before court - among which all the parliamentary members of the party back then -, five women were prosecuted for partaking in violent or other illegal activities as well as in the constitution of a criminal organization – which was one of the basic accusation the party leadership and members faced, apart from individual prosecutions for involvement in criminal actions, like murders and attacks against immigrants and political opponents (Psarras, 2015). All five of them denied accusations, while two, Eleni Zaroulia and Nicole Mpeneki, partner of the leader Nikos Michaloliakos and ex-partner of the ex-first-henchman Panagiotis Lagos respectively, stated that they were involved in the party only professionally or through their relationship to their partners³. This is a typical example of how far-right women, when in court, resort to gender stereotypes in order to avoid responsibility for their political activity (Köttig, 2017). In 2020, three women were convicted, including the former MP and wife of the leader, Eleni Zaroulia.

Whereas Golden Dawn women's activity and rhetoric has been analyzed in a series of studies (Psarra, 2014; Félix, 2015; Alvanou, 2017; Koronaiou & Sakellariou, 2017; Anastasiadou & Samara, 2022; Kamenou, 2023), the question of violence – in practice or in ideology - has been ignored, although political violence has been a significant practice in Greek political culture (Xenakis, 2012) and despite the fact that far-right violence in specific scores tremendously high in Greece in comparison to other European countries, as Jupskås & Fielitz (2022) explain. This indifference should be no surprise, as there is often a gender-biased (mis)interpretation of far-right women's violence, which results in its invisibility or underestimation (Bitzan et al. 2003,, Köttig, 2017). However, even when investigated, the focus has been mainly on if and how women have been involved in far-right violent activity, and not so much on if and how this relates to their ideological background and motivation (Manthe, 2019).

³ N. Mpeneki: I was not a member of Golden Dawn, I was... a professional member. [N. Μπενέκη: Δεν ήμουν μέλος της Χ.Α., ήμουν... επαγγελματικό μέλος.] 27.09.2019. *Efimerida ton Syntakton*. https://www.efsyn.gr/ellada/dikaiosyni/i-diki-tis-hrysis-aygis/212490_n-mpeneki-den-imoy-n-melos-tis-ha-imoy-n; Golden Dawn trial – Zaroulia: Political persecution, foreigners bring diseases. [Δίκη Χρυσής Αυγής - Ζαρούλια: Πολιτική δίωξη, οι ξένοι φέρνουν αρρώστιες.] Sofia Spigkou. 09.10.2019. *Ethnos*. <https://www.ethnos.gr/greece/article/65680/dikhxryshsayghszaroyliapolitikhdiokhoixenoifernoynarrosties>

But, to understand far-right violence in general, we should not only examine acts of brutality alone, as they then often end up being interpreted as isolated cases of aggressive behavior or attacks of mentally unstable perpetrators. To comprehend far-right violence and the context of its manifestation, it is also necessary to take into account far-right ideology as well as the politicization of violence in far-right movements (Ravndal & Enstad, 2021). According to Coester et al. (2023), ideological elements like antisemitism, racism and antifeminism should be seriously considered as political motives when it comes to right-wing terrorism, while recent E.U. working definition for violent right-wing extremism emphasizes the political and ideological motivation behind it, underlining that what qualifies far-right violence as such is ‘a set of particular goals beyond the act itself as opposed to other forms of violence’ (Project Based Collaboration on Violent Right-Wing Extremism 2021, p. 2), with these goals to be ‘classified as political (for example seeking to destroy democracy, overthrow the government, create a state based on authoritarian rule, intense nationalism, and racial purity, or to stop immigration) [...or...] ideological (belief in white supremacy, antisemitism, anti-Muslim hatred, belief in the “great replacement” or upcoming genocide of the white race)’ (Project Based Collaboration on Violent Right-Wing Extremism 2021, p. 2-3).

Here it should be noted that far-right violence covers a broad range of acts and does not refer only to murderous attacks or terrorist actions – although there is an increased legal interest in these aspects and much data collection and research revolves around them. According to Bjørge & Ravndal (2019, p.5), “all violent attacks whose target selection is based on extreme-right beliefs and corresponding enemy categories—immigrants, minorities, political opponents, or governments [...including...] ‘vandalism and spontaneous violence’ should be considered as far-right violence, or as EU working definition for violent right-wing extremism (Project Based Collaboration on Violent Right-Wing Extremism 2021, p.3) notes, “right-wing extremist violence may be defined as any physical or psychological attack, or act of public disorder, whose target selection is based on extreme right-wing beliefs”. Still, such definitions presuppose a common ground of what is understood as violence, that is criminalized violence. Thus, they leave outside authoritarian or racist state violence, often praised or even officially legalized by the far-right when in power. In any case, a definition of violence is per se a tricky issue (Miller, 2021). It should not be doubted that violence is connected to power, force and control and it often refers to causing physical or emotional pain, destruction, deprivation. It may refer to physical action but also to verbal attacks and threats, like hate speech. It can take place off or nowadays even online. Moreover, violence may be recognized and discussed as such or it may be silenced or denied. It may be normalized or even welcomed as necessary and inevitable or as heroic and beautiful, as is the case of altruistic self-harm. As Miller (2021, p.5) notes, although “we probably all agree that its material referents matter”, culturally violence is much of a discursive construction as well, since what is understood and recognized as violence is the product of historically and geographically specific socio-political dynamics and cannot be taken for granted.

This is not at all to doubt the broader political dangers or the harmful consequences of far-right violence from which people suffer – often in invisibility and silence (Köbberling, 2022) –, but thinking of violence in discursive and cultural terms is very much connected to the question of how the far-right represents violence and how this contributes to its’ legitimization and normalization – first for those who exercise it and then for those who accept or support it. Marcks & Pawelz (2022) note that political narratives of threat, more and more mainstreamed today, are only a step away from the exercise of violence and should not be underestimated, since they constitute emotionalized discourses that construct a state of emergency against dangerous enemies, and they can activate palingenetic fantasies and legitimize violence. Such fantasies of collective rebirth, connected to millenarian idealizing of self-sacrifice, can also explain how perpetrators of violence overcome fear of (even their own) death (Griffin, 2003). The question of how such far-right fantasies address women, if at all, remains crucial here, since the dominant narrative represents violence as a men’s issue, while women are supposed to be appalled at violence, naturally not inclined to it.

Here, focusing on the case of Golden Dawn, I am asking what role the discourse of violence has played in Greek neo-Nazi women’s political imaginary and construction of femininity. My intention is not at all to state that ideology is translated one in one in acts of violence; this would be just simplistic and research has shown that the personal stories of members of the far-right scene are often more complicated than we believe (Köttig, 2004; Blee, 2018). However, examination of discourse on violence can shed light in the worldview(s) and identity(ies) articulated for and among women in the far-right, in the space it may open for practicing or accepting violence and can thus contribute to the contextualization of women’s activity, of their potential participation in violent acts, or their support towards violence. Last, examining the relations between femininity and far-right discourses of violence can also contribute to the understanding of what kind of gendered identities and values are propagated towards the broader public at a specific socio-historical moment of neo-liberal transformation and deepening of social inequalities, like the current one, when political forces more or less inspired or influenced by fascist and authoritarian tradition, gain more and more political space, as well as to the understanding of the potential socio-political impact this may have on normalizing and mobilizing exclusionary and harmful attitudes, affect and practices (Krzyżanowski, 2020).

Below, I will first present a short summary of Golden Dawn activity in Greece and the participation of women in it as well as the theoretical and methodological tools that were used in the analysis of party media addressing women, which has highlighted the discursive significance of violence. I will then analyze the gendered dimensions of violence discourse and how they contributed to the construction of a militant feminine identity in the context of Golden Dawn politics, closing with some critical remarks on the discursive politicization and normalization of violence in contemporary far-right politics, problematizing the dominant binary image of the woman-mother and the man-soldier.

The case of Golden Dawn women

Golden Dawn, an offspring of the afterwar Greek far-right, has clearly been a neo-Nazi party. Although it persistently denied its relation to historical national socialism in public after its electoral rise in 2012, its ideological references and practices point directly to historical Nazi movement, whose history and legacy have been of most significant influence on the party organization and ideology – a characteristic that differentiates Golden Dawn from other far-right organizations in Greece. The heritage of national socialism is obvious not only on its open antisemitism, racism, devotion to the supposed racial community and militarism, nonnegotiable discipline to the leader, but also on the direct references to Hitler and Nazis (Psarras, 2012). Golden Dawn exists since 1980, when it started as an ideological, intellectual circle devoted to national socialist theory, and it became a party in the early 1990s, after it mobilized on the streets for the Macedonian name issue. It entered the Greek parliament for the first time in 2012, finding fertile ground in the political unrest and polarization ignited by the debt ‘crisis’ and the consequent austerity politics (Ellinas, 2013), while it intensified its threats and attacks on immigrants and political opponents, until it was brought to court in 2015 with the accusation of constituting a criminal organization (Psarras, 2015). In the national election of July 7th 2019, the party was outseated from parliament, which together with the legal prosecutions against it and later convictions resulted in many high-ranking members abandoning the party and forming new political schemes. In the trial of Golden Dawn, five women – all closely related to the organization – had been charged with accusations. One among them, Themis Skordeli was in charge of the notorious storm-troop of Agios Panteleimon in Athens and she has been convicted as instigator, giving orders in cases of life-threatening attacks to immigrants and political opponents. Nicol Mpeneki, another member who was active in Women’s Front and very close to the leadership, also ex fiancée of Giannis Lagos – one of the leading figures and MP of Golden Dawn, who founded and led the splinter party E.LA.SYN. from 2019 to 2013, and who was convicted in Golden Dawn trial in 2020 while elected in European Parliament –, was questioned in court for photographs showing her illegally holding and pointing with guns. Last, (ex) policewoman Venetia Popori, close informant of Golden Dawn, was accused of – and convicted – for possessing dozens of illegal guns and bullets⁴.

But what has been the role of women in Golden Dawn? Golden Dawn started as a men’s organization back in the 1980s, but it soon included women as members. In late 1990s, when Golden Dawn started to participate in elections, it tried to include more and more women, not only to attract women voters but also because of mandatory gender quotas it had to fulfil regarding election

⁴ Information regarding the trial of Golden Dawn has been drawn from domestic press covering the trial (e.g. Efimerida ton Syntakton, <https://www.efsyn.gr>) as well as the monitoring initiative Golden Dawn Watch - <https://goldendawnwatch.org/>.

candidacies⁵ (Psarra, 2014). In 2007 it initiated a women's organization, named Women's Front, which started its activity with online blogging. Until its withdrawal in 2013 more than one thousand entries were published in the three blogs administrated by Women's Front, that is the blogs 'Women's Front for the People and the Fatherland', 'Ideological Library', and 'Kitchen'. Later, Women's Front participated in rallies and in food distributions, it organized local women's cells and ideological lessons for women. It is important here that Women's Front paid strong attention on ideology – group gatherings organized and managed by high-ranking women were closed to members and ideology was a crucial element in the initiation process (Félix, 2015). Antifeminism combined with nationalism and a Nazi-inspired as well as Nazi-praising racist and anti-liberal perspective have been in the core of this ideology (Psarra, 2014; Koronaiou & Sakellariou, 2017; Anastasiadou & Samara, 2022). Women's Front was rather active in period 2007-2013, closely linked to its leader Evgenia Christou's activity, and then disappeared as a collective women's space from public, although women - and Evgenia Christou herself - continued to participate in Golden Dawn politics. In 2012 and then again in 2015 two women were elected each time as MPs among eighteen MPs with Golden Dawn, while among the four party representatives who were elected in Athens City Council in May 2019, two were women. Although evidently fewer than the men in the party -unfortunately, however, there are no official or other data on the exact numbers of membership -, women's role has not been restricted to presenting a friendly face to the public or taking care of background organizational work, but as Kamenou (2023) points out, they have also claimed a place as 'political soldiers' in the nationalist movement, negotiating the strict patriarchal and masculine norms which dominate the Greek far-right.

Exploring the articulation of a feminine Greek neo-Nazi identity: the emerging element of violence

A first-step exploratory analysis of Women's Front blogs, accompanied by and compared to other party media material, showed that violence is a central element in discourse addressed by and addressing women. It should be noted that Women's Front discourse has been partly produced and signed by women of the organization and much reproduced from other Golden Dawn or broader far-right media. Moreover, although men had the dominant role in leadership and intellectual production in the party - at least in public -, women's active role in supporting and promoting Golden Dawn agenda should not be underestimated, even if it is not clear to what extent women co-determined it (Anastasiadou & Samara, 2022). In any case, the emergence of violence during the analysis of women's discourse - as expressed and defended by women and their 'Front' -, raised a series of further questions: what meaning is given to violence in neo-Nazi discourse? What is its' role in the articulation of gendered political

⁵ According to the law in Greece, the gender quota for election lists was a minimum of 30% for men and for women candidates – a quota which has risen to 40% since 2019.

identities, and in particular feminine identities? How (if) is feminine militancy constructed in Greek neo-Nazi ideology? And moreover: how are historical national socialist interpretations of violence interwoven with current local or transnational nationalist narratives in women's discourse?

A qualitative in-depth analysis followed on fifty selected texts of Women's Front blogs, chosen for their relevance to the topic of violence and gender. The analysis, based on discourse theory (Laclau & Mouffe, 1985) and critical discourse analysis (Wodak, 2001, Reisigl, 2017) from a feminist (Lazar, 2007) and intersectional perspective (Riegel, 2016), showed that in order to articulate a collective political identity, Golden Dawn women draw on three distinct - distinguished here one from another mostly for analytical reasons - discourses: historical Nazi discourse, contemporary international white supremacist discourse as well as old and contemporary Greek nationalist discourse (the latter to a certain extent widespread in the Greek context and mostly among conservative spaces and actors). These threads of discourse are combined in a women's perspective, producing a feminine radical right identity in the context of contemporary Greek politics, and in specific producing what can be named as a *feminine Greek neo-Nazi identity*. The resultant narrative, represented as the one and only legitimate 'truth', appears as strongly antagonistic to concurrent alternative political discourses, which include feminist, antiracist, left and liberal discourses. 'Violence' is indeed one of the main elements in this narrative, related to a series of significant signifiers, such as 'war', 'threat', 'resistance', '(counter)attack', 'genocide', 'death', 'heroes/heroines', which are here given meaning from a gendered, feminine perspective. It is this feminine (or feminized) narrative perspective on violence and its basic components which emerged in the analysis, that I will present below.

Racial war, enemies and the gendered national body

The journalist and expert on Golden Dawn history and politics Dimitris Psarras (2015) has noted that the concept of 'war' belongs to the core of Golden Dawn leadership's worldview, who copy the historical national socialist rhetoric by depicting themselves as "wolves among the sheep", fighting a 'waging war for countless centuries' and seeking to make true Hitler's vision for an *Endsieg* - in their words fighting 'a total and merciless war and we will not cease until we emerge triumphant' (Psarras 2015, p. 65). Thus, Golden Dawn represents itself as the savior of the imagined community, ready to fight against all its alleged enemies - internal and external -, who supposedly lead a war against the nation and the race. Women's Front adopted the same rhetoric. In May 2012, when the party entered the Greek Parliament, Women's Front republished in its blog 'Ideological Library'⁶ a post from the Youth's organization, which copied its title

⁶ Sources originating from media of Golden Dawn or Women's Front are cited here partially, with reference only to the titles of posts/articles and the names of the websites/blogs/newspapers as well as the date of publication. This choice attunes to recent concerns on how to avoid reproducing direct web-links to far-right media through scientific work.

from Joseph Goebbels speech in Sportpalast in 1943 – ‘Stand up Greek People’⁷ and let the storm burst!’ - and which reproduced national socialist language amalgamated with contemporary racist discourses. The text reads that

Golden Dawn has signaled the Call of War [...and ...] undertakes the protection of our persecuted People. Its protection from both the regime of Zionist loan sharks and the barbarian hordes of Asia and Africa. It is time we remove the redundant fat of this people; it is time we punish the ones guilty of this Treason⁸.

Golden Dawn, like other neo-Nazi organizations, has insisted on open antisemitic and antizionist statements in contrast to other contemporary far-right parties, which avoid explicit antisemitic language in favor of a pro-Israel stance – although they may include antisemitic adherents (Kahmann, 2017; Grimm, 2019). Antisemitic images of Jewish bankers and ‘loan sharks’ have suited well the anti-systemic rhetoric of the party during the recent financial crisis in Greece, when international financial institutions and organizations, such as private banks, the European Central Bank and IMF, played a crucial role in the management of public debt crisis. But Golden Dawn did not just reproduce an old antisemitic rhetoric – its antisemitism was combined with latest racist anti-immigration and anti-Islam discourses, which depict the nation as a biological and cultural unity in danger of degradation due to alien invading elements – those mentioned above as ‘barbarian hordes of Asia and Africa’. Next to outer enemies, Golden Dawn also refers to inner ‘betrayers’. These are its political opponents who need to be combated and exterminated as ‘redundant fat’, i.e. as an unnecessary burden to the national body, who deserve punishment for failing or refusing to protect the nation from outer enemies, be that immigrants, Muslims or Jews.

In Women’s Front discourse the nation and the race suffer also from a domestic ‘decadence’ caused by a moral crisis, attributed to a conspiracy plan. Moral decadence is explained as part of a war plan organized by outer forces and backed up by inner collaborators, aiming at disorientating the people from their devotion to the wellbeing and advancement of the racial/national community, which is depicted as nothing less than people’s natural purpose and duty.

Interestingly, sexual and reproductive practices stand in the middle of this war. ‘Low birth rates’, ‘abortion’, ‘homosexuality’, and ‘miscegenation’ are pictured as practices of the plan that aims at the degradation, if not extinction, of the community. Women’s Front condemnation of such practices does not lie on conservative fears; following the legacy of Aryanism, it results from the belief that such practices do not promote but on the contrary, they sabotage the reproductive survival and advancement of the race and nation, which are envisaged as the greatest cause. In women’s blogs it becomes clear that women are attributed and called upon to play a special role in this mission: it is women who are reminded again and again that they bear the responsibility to reproduce

⁷ Words in translated passages written in whole or often with their first letter in capitals follows the choice of writers in Golden Dawn and Women’s Front media. The choice of the writers signals an attempt to underline the significance or even to ascribe superiority to content of capitalized words.

⁸ *Stand up Greek People and let the storm burst!* [Ξεσηκώσου τώρα Ελληνικέ Λαέ και άσε την καταιγίδα να ξεσπάσει!]. May 2012. Blog Ideological Library.

the nation and race and to reproduce it right. Drawing on historical fascist ecological thought, which survives until today but often revives in different forms from the past (Forchtner, 2020), ‘Greeks’, the Greek nation, are represented as part of a broader ‘endangered’ white European family, to which other European nations belong too as brother-nations and whose reproduction is women’s urgent duty. In pictures (re)produced by Women’s Front, Europe is portrayed as a female figure: for example, a post titled ‘Racial ecology’, apart from written text explaining racial theory, also includes a picture of a figure resembling a frowning, young white woman on the back of a white Siberian tiger (Pict.1⁹), accompanied by the caption ‘Endangered species. Save the tiger of Siberia and the human of Europe’. Not only does Women’s Front appeal here to and appropriates quite mainstream preservation worries of the environmental movement but it also identifies an alleged race with its women – or better women with the community they supposedly belong to. Thus, women lose any individuality, since their existence obtains meaning only through the community and the ways they relate to it. This is no surprise, since Golden Dawn openly positions itself against human rights and rights of the individual, with women representatives and members publicly defending such political positions even against women’s rights (Anastasiadou & Samara, 2022).

The racial war Golden Dawn is devoted to is a *gendered* war between races, conceptualized as a competition of natural, biological terms. In Women’s Front discourse historical national socialist ideology meets contemporary debates on European borders and migration together with debates on gender and sexuality. In the aforementioned text ‘Racial Ecology’, racial theory is used to explain the supposed dangers of antiracism, combined with dangers of homosexuality and abortion. Antiracism is rejected as an ideological distortion of the racial logic by opposing and threatening the ideal of racial purity and homogeneity of the community by allowing racial ‘miscegenation’. Neglection of giving children, termination of pregnancies and homosexual living are also part of the conspiracy against the race, where the race is illustrated as overflowed with ‘alien’ elements and distracted from the responsibility to reproduce itself by giving in in distorted sexual and reproductive practices. The above narrative, diffused in Women’s Front texts, is well summarized in the following passage:

[...] biological foundation - the blood - is the womb of creation. Any preach of antiracism that leads to the cultivation and acceptance of miscegenation is disastrous [...] European races are today more than ever in danger. We are experiencing an intrusion of other-races aiming at the dilution of national coherence and consequently the miscegenation and ultimate and irreversible extinction of races. [...] The social planning entails, not at all by chance, the so-called low birth rate and abortions. But also homosexuality, which is promoted in a sick way towards the European youth as a ‘lifestyle’.¹⁰

⁹ The pictures mentioned are to be found in the picture appendix at the end of the paper.

¹⁰ *Racial Ecology* [Φυλετική Οικολογία]. 06.04.2010. Blog Women’s Front for the People and the Fatherland.

The national and the racial¹¹ community under threat is articulated in Women's Front discourse as a gendered body that consequently faces gendered dangers. Women in particular are represented and addressed as victims of the violence exerted by the enemies of the nation/race - but also as an inextricable part of the solution, of the counterattack of the community, as will be explained further below. The representation of women as vulnerable to violence and in need of protection is not at all an original element of Golden Dawn; it is rather a common patriarchal motif and practice, incorporated into Golden Dawn's scheme of war. In contrast, this victim discourse does not apply to representations of masculinities in Golden Dawn and Women's Front discourse. Men are not addressed as victims the way women are – they are mainly depicted as strong and combative and only indirectly represented as victims, as part of the culturally and morally attacked youth and consequently disorientated from its racial/national potential and duties (supposedly false values of individualism, superficial lifestyle, homosexuality, drugs¹²). Moreover, although the myth of rising criminality by 'third-worlders' is a common topic in Golden Dawn discourse, men are not explicitly depicted as suffering from it directly. It is vaguely the 'fatherland' and in more embodied categories the women (being attacked or raped/harassed¹³), or even the animals (stray dogs, cats, doves or pets being stolen, killed and consumed as food¹⁴) that supposedly suffer from immigrants. Women are also addressed by Golden Dawn as victims of gender violence, but gender violence is here instrumentalized from a racist perspective: it is white women and Greek women suffering attacks by men of 'other-race'. As has been noted (Anastasiadou & Samara, 2022), Golden Dawn and its women have been pioneers in diffusing into the Greek context this pattern, which has been intensively used by far-right parties and far-right women themselves across borders during the last years, in order to mobilize people against the 'racial other' and to gain members and electoral support, and which becomes more and more dominant in mainstream discourse and politics nowadays (Farris, 2017; Hark & Villa, 2017). Although in Women's Front discourse gender violence can also be exercised by Greek men (to show how much in decline, 'decadent' the living conditions have been) or against 'non-Greek' women (and in some cases also young boys – to show how 'uncivilized' immigrants are in comparison to the 'civilized West'), it is mostly violence against 'our' women by men of 'other-

¹¹ Nation and race are often referred together in this paper, as the logic that constitutes them is common in Golden Dawn's discourse: both the 'white race' and the 'nation' as part of the white race family are understood in biological terms and even references to culture and cultural differences imply or signify natural differences among groups.

¹² *Survival Instinct* [Ένστικτο Επιβίωσης]. 21.05.2011; *Family Table* [Το Οικογενειακό Τραπέζι]. 03.05.2011; *Racial Ecology* [Φυλετική Οικολογία]. 06.04.2010. Blog Women's Front for the People and the Fatherland.

¹³ Some examples from Blog Women's Front for the People and the Fatherland: *England: Rape 'Epidemy' of Underage English Women by Muslims* [Αγγλία: 'Επιδημία' Βιασμών Ανήλικων Αγγλίδων από Μουσουλμάνους]. 24.05.2011; *'Hungry' Illegal Immigrants Everywhere* ['Πεινασμένοι' Λαθρομετανάστες Παντού]. 28.12.2011

¹⁴ *Hypocritical Selective 'Sensitivity'* [Υποκριτική Επιλεκτική 'Ευαισθησία']. 26.11.12. Blog Women's Front for the People and the Fatherland.

race' that is ascribed special significance as a widespread threat to white women's safety. Thus, we read in Women's Front blog:

[The woman today] is afraid of moving around alone in hundreds of areas of the country, in fear of robberies, attacks and rapes by illegal intruders who overflow the local communities.¹⁵

and

A shocking report [...] revealed that 92% of gang rapes in London come from non-whites. Fifty percent of the victims are white women.¹⁶

In Women's Front narrative, women are also victims of a cultural attack to the nation/race, which disorients them from fulfilling their natural cause and duty to contribute to the reproduction of the national/racial community by mothering and educating the new generation to the proper values¹⁷ (Koroniou & Sakellariou, 2017). Anti-feminism consists a central element in this construction (Psarra 2014; Anastasiadou & Samara, 2022). Feminism is blamed for alienating women from community-centered orientation, resulting in women following individualist values as well as leading a superficial lifestyle, carried away by fashion, consumption and entertainment and caring more about those activities, rather than for family life. Feminism is also blamed for promoting a destructive 'competition' between women and men, in the name of gender equality, instead of cooperation and partnership in a model of heterosexuality and gender complementarity¹⁸. Gender equality and demands or legislation for broader gender rights, together with LGBTQI movement, are also represented as part of the international plan against the nation and the race: homosexuality is represented as an illness and abnormality as well as an element of the outer plan of cultural and consequently biological degradation of the race/nation¹⁹. 'Politicians', the Greek political status quo, - are depicted as betrayers in this war against the nation, as they have supposedly failed to address the above social problems and to suggest policies that should promote births and motherhood, the avoidance of abortions and increase in young couples getting married and making their own families²⁰. Mainstream media are also depicted as playing a

¹⁵ *Propaganda in Women's Magazines* [Η Προπαγάνδα Στα Γυναικεία Περιοδικά]. 07.03.2011. Blog Women's Front for the People and the Fatherland.

¹⁶ *Of Other-race 92% of Gang Rape Perpetrators* [Αλλόφυλοι Οι Δράστες Στο 92% Των Ομαδικών Βιασμών]. 28.05.2010. Blog Women's Front for the People and the Fatherland.

¹⁷ Here culture is constructed as an expression of a racial and national spirit, which allegedly originates directly from nature and is part of the biological potential of the nation/race, while outer enemies conspire to deteriorate the conditions that would allow the nation/race to fully develop its cultural potential and fulfill its natural cause. See *Racial Ecology* [Φυλετική Οικολογία]. 06.04.2010. Blog Women's Front for the People and the Fatherland.

¹⁸ *Woman and the Modern World* [Η Γυναίκα και ο Σύγχρονος Κόσμος]. 29.04.2012. Blog Women's Front for the People and the Fatherland.

¹⁹ *WOMEN VS MEN (PART B)* [ΓΥΝΑΙΚΕΣ VS ΑΝΔΡΕΣ (Β' ΜΕΡΟΣ)], 20.11.2007; *After Establishment of Homosexuality Comes Pedophilia* [Μετά την Καθιέρωση της Ομοφυλοφιλίας έρχεται η Παιδοφιλία]. 27.8.11. Blog Women's Front for the People and the Fatherland.

²⁰ *Women VS Men (Part B)* [ΓΥΝΑΙΚΕΣ VS ΑΝΔΡΕΣ (Β' ΜΕΡΟΣ)]. 20.11.2007. Blog Women's Front for the People and the Fatherland.

hideous role in racial degradation by promoting false models to the population²¹, while other inner enemies, such as the left(ists) and anarchists are depicted as collaborators in the above so-called ‘crimes’ against the race, as they refuse to serve the nationalist project²².

Politicization of women: mothers and warriors in the racial war

But what is the role of women in the war Golden Dawn has declared against all its enemies, in its ‘Counter-attack’²³? Golden Dawn does not represent women only as victims of violence by the enemies of the nation, but it also stands for the politicization and mobilization of women, resembling the ways historical Nazi movement envisioned the involvement of women in its political struggle (Wagner, 2010). Thus, women are encouraged to take action and participate in the nationalist movement, they are called upon to be active and to contribute to its’ struggle. Their victimization serves the legitimization of their mobilization, as a political response to the dangers women and their nation face. Women are addressed as political subjects, but at the same time they are called upon to adopt a very specific model of subjectivity which complements – and does not compete with – men’s social and political roles in and which is devoted to the service of the national(ist) project. When it comes to violence, women are called upon to take action and to free themselves from violence as well as to work for others’ freedom. However, violence – a central signifier in women’s movement discourse – is here redefined as violence against the race and the mythical community, in opposition to competitive political approaches and mostly feminist critiques that address violence as an issue of gender relations and patriarchy (Anastasiadou & Samara, 2022).

In Women’s Front narrative, women’s freedom should be accomplished through action as well as through enlightenment and education – an education in alternative, racial values. Women should be educated themselves and they also have a duty as educators, that is as nurturers in the family and as cultural reproducers in society (Koronaïou & Sakelariou, 2017), e.g. as heroic teachers at schools – here a series of contemporary and historical female figures are praised for their nationalist work as teachers, as will be shown below. There is a major contradiction lying in this kind of emancipatory project, which interestingly is not named as ‘emancipation’, obviously because of the term’s strong connotations of historical autonomous feminist movements: women are called upon to become politically visible and active, and to break free from repressive mainstream lifestyles focused, as we read, exclusively on beauty, consumption, flirting and entertainment, but only to follow the norms set by a nationalist movement which

²¹ *Beware of interracial relationships* [Προσοχή στις Διαφυλετικές Σχέσεις]. 02.08.2010. Blog Women’s Front for the People and the Fatherland.

Propaganda in Women’s Magazines [Η Προπαγάνδα Στα Γυναικεία Περιοδικά]. 07.03.2011. Blog Women’s Front for the People and the Fatherland.

²² *Ag. Panteleimon: Police Provocations to Residents* [Αγ. Παντελεήμων: Αστυνομικές Προκλήσεις Σε Κατοίκους]. 24.11.08; *Woman and the modern world* [Η Γυναίκα και ο Σύγχρονος Κόσμος]. 29.04.2012. Blog Women’s Front for the People and the Fatherland.

²³ ‘Counter-attack’ [Αντεπίθεση] is a favorable concept in Golden Dawn discourse and it is also the name of the magazine of the party’s youth section.

praises gender segregation and heterosexual family life as ideals. In other words, women are called upon to be politically active, but not independent: women's action should be devoted to mothering and care, and any other activity, in order to be accepted, should be tuned to the racial, nationalist project, denouncing any kind of women's political autonomy. So, rather than being politically ignored, women are mobilized by Golden Dawn to work for emancipation, be that however not an emancipation from men's power, but an emancipation of the nation and the race from its oppressors. In order to do so, they are proposed a combative political attitude, a militant femininity which combines two – at first sight contradictory – elements, one creative and reproductive (woman as mother and nurturer) and one martial and aggressive (woman as warrior and fighter). The consistency of this scheme can only be understood in the context of Golden Dawn's narrative of racial competition²⁴.

Mothers as reproducers of the nation and race under attack

In Golden Dawn women's discourse motherhood is depicted as a creative practice linked to the biological and cultural reproduction of the community (Koronaïou & Sakellariou, 2017). This means that motherhood is not at all understood – and not even accepted or tolerated – as an individual choice of the mother or the parents. On the contrary, it is represented as the ultimate natural mission of women, with nature identified here with an imagined racial ecology – that is a system of human races competing for survival. Motherhood should offer women self-fulfillment, but only as a contribution to the resurrection of the community. In other words, it is this contribution to the race and to the nation that provides women with self-fulfillment, while motherhood is constructed as the principal means which connects women to the community. As has been noted, in Women's Front media a discursive process of women's 'motherization' takes place (Anastasiadou et al., 2015): women are imagined and praised as mothers – any other identity and activity of women is only accepted if it serves the race and the nation, but even then, it is only secondary in value in comparison to motherhood, which is depicted as women's 'utmost role' and 'highest honor', as for example exemplified in a text titled '*Women's Place in People's Community*'²⁵.

Where does this narrative of motherhood stem from? On the one hand, the pattern and the language used are linked to broader far-right discourse as well as to national socialism – as for example the aforementioned reference to '*people's community*' implies. On the other hand, the motif is also found in the tradition of Greek nationalism, which has long praised the 'mothers of the nation'. This observation points to one of the most important aspects of Golden Dawn Women's Front discourse: the marriage between national socialism and Greek nationalism. Evgenia Christou, in charge of Women's Front, when referring to the natural duty of women to reproduce their race and its culture, resembles -if

²⁴ Although Golden Dawn often follows the ethnopluralist discursive paradigm, racial competition logic is not at all abandoned, but nesting on the core of arguments that want the nation or race under attack of 'foreign' populations or falling behind in comparison to 'others' in reproductive terms.

²⁵ See for example: *Women's Place in People's Community* [Η Θέση της Γυναίκας στη Λαϊκή Κοινότητα]. 26.05.2007. Blog Women's Front for the People and the Fatherland.

not imitates - Gertrud Scholtz-Klink, the leader of National Socialist Women's League (NS-Frauenschaft), whose words have been openly reproduced in Women's Front blogs. A passage of a historical speech of Gertrud Scholtz-Klink in New Year's Eve of 1935, translated for the blog of Women's Front, reads

It is thus our duty to arouse again the sense of the Divine, to make the calling for motherhood the way through which the German woman will see her calling to become mother of the Nation. Then she will not live her life in egoism but in the service of her people.²⁶

When asked in an interview for a nationalist website about the aim of Women's Front, Evgenia Christou repeated the above call in almost identical words. Although she did not refer to national socialism openly, the similarity in ideas and language is striking. This is how Evgenia Christou explained the aim of Women's Front in her interview:

We are trying to show an alternative lifestyle to women [...] That they educate their children based on the values and ideals of our race. That they feel proud Greeks and that they love the divine gift of motherhood which Nature gave to them²⁷.

However, it is rather hard and to some extent pointless to distinguish between national socialist and Greek nationalist influences in a passage as the above. It is more insightful to approach such a statement as a point where fascist ideological tradition and local nationalist heritage meet, making it almost impossible to sort the two traditions out, to separate them from one another even for analytical purposes, which shows a striking (at least at first sight) paradox in their intersection: historical fascism with all its brutality in its ideology and practice can remain concealed in contemporary - often mainstream - nationalist discourse and thus become normalized; at the same time, however, it also shows how close these two nationalist traditions are in their narratives and rhetoric – at least where, like in Greece, soil and blood as well as a persistent images of dangers and enemies against the nation constitute the base of national identity. In Evgenia Christou's above statement, the references to race, divinity (in other texts to 'God') and motherhood as a natural gift resemble the ideology of the 3rd Reich, but they also belong to the core of the dominant Greek nationalist narrative, which not only ascribes an important role to women as mothers for the continuation of the 'eternal' - originating from 'ancient Greeks' - nation, but it also attributes characteristics of a collective threat to 'low birth rate' and abortion (Halkias, 2004).

The calling for reproduction is at the same time an urging for participation in race competition. Since the race and nation, constructed in blood terms, are depicted in danger of degradation and even extinction – history is used here to

²⁶ *To Our People's Women* [Προς τις Γυναίκες του Λαού μας]. July 2010. Blog Ideological Library.

²⁷ *Evgenia Christou: We Greek Women are Proud and Fighters!* [Ευγενία Χρήστου: Οι Ελληνίδες Είμαστε Υπερήφανες και Αγωνίστριες!]. 04.12.2012. Blog Women's Front for the People and the Fatherland.

prove the possibility of extinction of races, as the reference to Sumerians shows below -, threatened by other races and nations, which grow and spread over the white race and the Greek nation²⁸, women's contribution to interception of the decline of the community and the onslaught of 'other-races' – here the 'Muslims', since religion is used in Golden Dawn discourse as a racial category -, becomes a main strategy in winning the war of racial survival and domination. Thus, in Golden Dawn's narrative procreation and nurturing are not only creative practices, but they also function as a defensive or even aggressive practice against the racial enemy, whom they intend to fight by outperforming in reproduction – in numbers and in genetic quality. Such an explicit reference to racial competition is noteworthy, since Golden Dawn often uses ethnopluralist arguments in order to argue against the accusation of racism²⁹. Evgenia Christou has offered a good example of this urging towards women to reproduce the nation against the racial enemy, and this way to protect the race from disappearance.

Muslim women have six children on average, whereas the Greek woman barely one. Greek woman has the duty and honor to continue her race [genos]. [...] It is really unheard that we let the Greek race go extinct like Sumerians and other races went extinct in the depths of centuries.³⁰

Moreover, in this generative strategy against the enemy, women are not alone. Although it is mostly women that are assigned the tasks of mothering and care work, responsibilities of ensuring the well-being of the family and the education of the children are also allocated to men. Some writings underline both the role of the breadwinner and that of the instructive father as measures of self-fulfillment for men. Thus, masculinity consists of more than the role of "soldier" for men - at least in Golden Dawn women's discourse. As we read in a text signed by the nickname Telesilla:

Our Race must realize that it can make true what they fear the most: its numerical advantage, its perpetuation. Men will feel that their existence has a purpose in this world, by making a family and having ahead the challenge of educating their children and struggling for covering their needs. Women will accept their nature, the only real emancipation, to give birth and nurture children.³¹

²⁸ *The Constant Question: Why?* [Η Μόνιμη Ερώτηση: Γιατί;] 13.10.11. Blog Women's Front for the People and the Fatherland.

Golden Dawn for our Survival! [Χρυσή Αυγή για την Επιβίωση Μας!]. 16.06.12. Blog Women's Front for the People and the Fatherland.

²⁹ For example, in Ideological Library it has even been stated that Golden Dawn is against colonial exploitation, against globalization, against hatred for the other and pro a humanity consisting of autonomous nations in peace.

Love your Race [Αγάπα τη Φυλή Σου]. October 2012. Blog Ideological Library

³⁰ *Woman and the modern world* [Η Γυναίκα και ο Σύγχρονος Κόσμος]. 29.04.2012. Blog Women's Front for the People and the Fatherland.

³¹ *Fatherland is getting old* [Η Πατρίδα Γερνά]. 17.10.2007. Blog Women's Front for the People and the Fatherland.

Combat women (a): the right to self-defense, vigilantism and the re-establishment of state power

Although motherhood has been praised as the highest valued role for women in Women's Front discourse, femininity is not at all articulated as a passive, quiet or suave identity – one that would suit the model of mother and housewife as usually expected. On the contrary, women are called upon to show a strong, combat character, which can even authorize them to direct violent action. Although it is men that are primarily given the role of the fighter and soldier, women are also legitimized to support and to participate in violence, be it impulsive or planned, individual or collective – their potential for violence justified by eternal models of feminine warrior ancestors, and a narrative of a racial and political war emergency.

First of all, a spirit of fighting readiness is key in the representation of female membership in Golden Dawn. Women's Front logo alone proves that well. In the first period of the organization's blogging, it showed some female figures pointing with guns towards the public (Psarra, 2014), while later it resembled a young girl's figure holding a slingshot and pointing again directly towards the reader. The picture, painted in the three typical colors of Nazi and also Golden Dawn flag – black, red and white –, was accompanied by the motto 'always ready' (Pict.2). So, women are not only described as victims of violence, but also as militant political subjects who take action against it. Women's Front called for 'readiness' of women in the war against the enemies of the nation and race, focused mainly on 'other races' and secondarily on political opponents. Women were called upon to be ready to fight against criminal attacks in everyday life, dramatically described as full of dangers, unsafe and provoking insecurity. In 2012, when the party entered the parliament and gained popularity, Women's Front started to organize self-defense classes for women - 'only for Greek women' - against those constructed as criminal intruders, that is 'illegal immigrants', 'Muslims', 'third-worlders', who are accused of threatening women's safety during their daily routines, like for example in their stroll with kids, on the way back home or even inside their houses³². Women were thus encouraged to exercise their physical condition and fighting skills, so as to be able to protect themselves on the streets or at home in case of attack – and not to restrict their movement out of fear or depend on men's protection. Although visibility to the issues of women's free movement and safety in everyday life and the appeal for women's mobilization may at first sight seem as an empowering process, Golden Dawn addressed only a special category of women (those fitting in the category of 'Greek women') and did so in a racist and fanatical discursive context, which constructs racial and political 'others' as enemies who worth punishment, if not annihilation. It is thus a racist, nationalist empowerment, aiming at mobilization in the (limited) lines of Golden Dawn party, away from struggles for women's independence. This is so, because such a 'femonationalist'

³² *From First Self-Defense Seminar* [Απο το Πρώτο Σεμινάριο Αυτοάμυνας] 09.06.12; *Women's Self-Defense Lessons*. [Μαθήματα Αυτοάμυνας Γυναικών]. 09.10.12. Blog Women's Front for the People and the Fatherland.

(Farris, 2017) targeting of the male foreigner disguises and silences universal dimensions of patriarchal power, masculine violence, misogyny and sexism against women and redirects the problem against a vulnerable group, that is (male) immigrants and refugees.

Moreover, the call for women's combat 'readiness' has also an anti-systemic aspect, which delegitimizes (existent) state power and at first sight, calls for people's (controlled) insurgency. Based on images of failed, corrupted Greek state and police, who are blamed as incapable of protecting citizens, here women, from criminals (often meant as immigrants), the narrative says that women cannot rely anymore on institutions and therefore need to take action for their own (and their nation's) good. In a post on Women's Front official blog, signed with the female name 'Veta', the police are scorned for an official announcement advising women to be careful on the streets, e.g. by not walking alone late at night or wearing jewelry. The solution relies on Golden Dawn women who are called upon to address Greek women's problems, to take action and to play the role of catalyst in inspiring women's confidence and empowerment.

I will answer to the police by saying: "No, gentlemen, if you cannot do your job, we do not deserve to pay for your incapability – or your restrictions. We will go wherever we like, we will be out whatever time we want and wherever we want inside our Fatherland, and we will take the law in our hands, if necessary, in order to protect ourselves". (I am appealing to Nationalist Women: We have to finally answer to all the conditions. We are able to raise the morale of all women of Greece with our powerful presence where necessary)³³.

Golden Dawn women oscillate here between vigilantism and legality. In other posts, a self-defense advice was given, paying special attention to what counts as legal defense according to the law, so that women become informed and somehow aware of the limitations posed by law³⁴. This makes sense, if we take into account that the activism and rhetoric of Golden Dawn has often been (far) beyond the rule of law by taking or calling upon taking the law into one's hands. The appeal for women's readiness is illustrated with pictures depicting female figures with guns in their hands, for example a young woman waiting at home for potential inventors (Pict. 3)³⁵, while another picture of a woman pointing with a gun accompanies a post that asks for the right to self-defense against the incapable state (Pict. 4)³⁶. In a post reporting on a case of sexual harassment, lynching is indirectly suggested as the proper punishment, with the picture of a human figure hung on a tree (Pict. 5). Justice is here criticized for prioritizing the protection of human rights of criminals, instead of the rights of the local

³³ *If you cannot, we can!* [Αν δεν Μπορείτε Εσείς, Μπορούμε Εμείς!]. 02.06.11. Blog Women's Front for the People and the Fatherland.

³⁴ *Self-Defense Advice* [Συμβουλές Αυτοάμυνας]. 14.05.2007. Blog Women's Front for the People and the Fatherland.

³⁵ *Warn Them* [Προειδοποιήστε Τους]. 02.09.2007. Blog Women's Front for the People and the Fatherland.

³⁶ *Afghanis Raped Young Woman in Omonia* [Αφγανοί Βίασαν Κοπέλα στην Ομόνοια]. 02.12.2009. Blog Women's Front for the People and the Fatherland.

community³⁷. According to this logic, the state should be stricter in its punishing system, so as to avoid frustration and vigilantism by the people³⁸. Thus, death penalty is suggested as the proper punishment in cases of child molestation³⁹. For example, a post reporting on a case of ‘pedophilia’ and criticizing the punishment of the perpetrator as soft and therefore unfair, the text is accompanied by a picture of a broken mirror and the message ‘Kill them! Boogeymen exist.’ (Pict. 6)⁴⁰. However, although women are depicted as ready to take the law into their hands if necessary, the solution proposed in the long run is not people’s spontaneous or autonomous action of vigilantism, but a state organized and governed by Golden Dawn itself. So, anti-systemic rhetoric is only a means of bringing women (and men) closer to Golden Dawn, so that they trust the power to the party, which can then re-establish the state and its power over people.

Combat women (b): women at war and the legacy of eternal warriors

What does an alternative make-up look like? That is the colors of war on the face of a woman⁴¹ – army women become beauty symbols against what Women’s Front depicts as mainstream, sexist beauty norms. But it is not only an issue of aesthetics, since Golden Dawn women also state their readiness for joining the army next to men. Indeed, women’s military service has been one of the official demands of the party, expressed in parliament for the first time in 2012 by former MP Eleni Zaroulia, during a discussion on Istanbul Convention – military service proposed as an alternative to a convention aiming at preventing and combating violence against women. Eleni Zaroulia, who was the only MP in parliament who objected the ratification of the convention, stated that what constitutes a discrimination against women is their non-enlistment in army and proposed the legislation of obligatory military service for women at the age of 18 – the same as for men⁴². Some days later, in an interview of hers for a nationalist website, Evgenia Christou expressed the same position: she stood for women’s service in the army and explained that Golden Dawn recognizes a manifold potential in women against the stereotype of the soft vulnerable woman, stating that women

³⁷ *Whom does the State Protect?* [Ποιον Προστατεύει το Κράτος;]. 16.1.10. Blog Women’s Front for the People and the Fatherland.

³⁸ *Children Pornography* [Παιδική Πορνογραφία]. 01.12.2009. Blog Women’s Front for the People and the Fatherland.

³⁹ Death penalty is a quite mainstreamed suggestion by the far-right, when it comes to children’s sexual abuse. In 2019, for example, the leader of the far-right party Greek Solution, Kyriakos Velopoulos, has openly proposed the establishment of death penalty for such cases. Giota Tessi. Fascist Solutions [Φασιστικές Λύσεις]. 15.07.2019. *Efimerida ton Syntakton*. https://www.efsyn.gr/politiki/antipoliteysi/203720_fasistikes-lyseis

⁴⁰ *Ridiculous instead of Exemplary the Punishment of the Sick General* [Γελοία Αντί για Παραδειγματική η Ποινή του Νοσηρού Στρατηγού]. 14.04.10. Blog Women’s Front for the People and the Fatherland.

⁴¹ *Alternative Make-Up* [Εναλλακτικό Μακιγιάζ...]. 23.05.2007. Blog Women’s Front for the People and the Fatherland.

⁴² Protocol of 15th Term of Greek Parliament, 1st Period, 71th Plenary Session, 13.11.2012

are ‘no fragile ornaments’⁴³ – thus claiming an active social role for women, even in fields that have been traditionally masculine in Greece, as the army. However, she added clearly that women’s role in service should be assisting to that of men, who should have the first place as armed soldiers. This reassurance, though, for a secondary role of women in army is not always the case in Women’s Front discourse, at least in the level of the imaginary, as will be explained next.

Women’s Front mythology of women warriors occupy a special place – next to women teachers of the nation. It should be noted that the image of the woman-warrior occasionally appears in Golden Dawn media as well, which indicates its relatively broader acceptance in the movement, but it mostly unfolds in women’s media. Golden Dawn women identify with a series of heroized female figures who are manifested as having fought in warfare bravely and vigorously, sometimes even more than their male comrades. Thus, women’s place is not only in the house nurturing children but also in the battlefield. Although men come clearly first in the role of fighters in Golden Dawn – and this is not doubted in Women’s Front writings – women’s ability and skill in war is not at all undervalued, but rather praised in cases of heroines of the past, even compared to that of men whom women are occasionally depicted as overcoming in combativeness⁴⁴. Such competitive instances, though contradictory to Golden Dawn’s segregated gender model, only little imply gender antagonism by women’s side. References to women’s extra-ordinary strength, described as fighting even better than men, mostly serve the idealization of women warriors – their comparison to men only proving the greatness of women’s courage and power.

But who are these fighting figures praised by Golden Dawn women? Women’s Front heroic warriors come to a good part from the dominant Greek nationalist narrative – reproducing and reconstructing here the myth of the continuation of the nation from Greek antiquity to War of Independence and further to national struggles in 20th century. They also come from the historical fascist movement and the international contemporary ultra-nationalist movement. Other cases of famous women warriors in European history are also praised in Women’s Front – depicted as fighting for a national(ist) cause. As the list of warriors is long, I am going to present here only some outstanding examples.

First, as explained, the Greek nationalist narrative is a privileged field, from which Women’s Front draws in order to construct its national fighting heroines. Starting from the Greek antiquity, Women’s Front introduces women of ancient Sparta as the superior model for women, the ‘eternal models for nationalist women’⁴⁵, to some extent following the idealization of Spartan women by the Nazis. Spartan women are praised for their toughness, independent spirit and at

⁴³ In Greek the French word *bibelot* (ornament) is used to name fragile, small decorative items and metaphorically for small-bodied, elegant women and further for “fragile” femininity, that is one that is inherently vulnerable and needs special care and protection.

Evgenia Christou: We Greek Women are Proud and Fighters! [Ευγενία Χρήστου: Οι Ελληνίδες Είμαστε Υπερήφανες και Αγωνίστριες!]. 04.12.2012. Blog Women’s Front for the People and the Fatherland.

⁴⁴ *Laskarina Mpourpoulina* [Λασκαρίνα Μπουμπουλίνα]. 10.06.2007; *Moscho Tzavela (1760-1803)* [Μόσχω Τζαβέλα (1760-1803)]. 06.08.2007. Blog Women’s Front for the People and the Fatherland.

⁴⁵ *Eternal Models of Nationalist Women* [Τα Αιώνια Πρότυπα των Εθνικιστριών]. 03.06.2011. Blog Women’s Front for the People and the Fatherland.

the same time devotion to their community. They are depicted as women of strong character, discipline and excellent physical condition, of high sense of responsibility towards their people, being strict and rigid mothers and partners⁴⁶. Among Spartan women's qualities is their fighting spirit, as explained in the post titled 'Eternal models of nationalist women', which refers to a text from an official Greek school book of 1959 – this interestingly shows the relation of Golden Dawn to historical nationalism in Greece, in which Spartan women have also served as a model for women's devotion to fatherland. Spartan women are here praised for not abandoning the homeland, according to an evacuation plan proposed by Spartan men soldiers, but staying and supporting men's preparation and actual fight throughout the battle. In another post⁴⁷, the fight and victory in the battle of Sparta against King Pyrrhus is credited completely to women (and children), as men's army was away from the city.

Moving forward to time, the war of independence, known as the 'Greek revolution', serves as a source for heroines depicted as having fought with guns and fire for the liberation of the nation. Women warriors are here illustrated as models of courage, strength and even excellence in war skills. So, we read the story of Moscho Tzavela, who fought in Souli battle in 1792 against the army of the Ottoman pasha Ali, leading 400 women with guns – women's contribution to the battle is estimated in the text as crucial for the victory of the army of Souli⁴⁸. The story is reproduced from a book of 1914, collection of folk songs, by Nikos Politis, who is considered the founder of ethnology in Greece. The text is supplemented with a reference to a biographical book on Moscho Tzavela written by Lilika Nakou, a female writer of the first wave of feminism in Greece. These references show that Golden Dawn women's mythology of women warriors is not an innovative construction of Golden Dawn and Women's Front. On the contrary Women's Front draws here on older narratives of women's role in the national history, it reproduces and reconstructs the already existent myths of the dominant national historiography, which to a certain extent has also been produced and used by first wave (and later second wave) feminists for promoting women's rights. As Poulos (2009) has explained, the woman – warrior has been a central element in the articulation of a feminine national identity in Greece all the way from 19th to 20th century with feminists, nationalists and even the left participating in the construction of this legacy of feminine combats. Other examples of heroic women warriors of the nation include the story of Domna Visvisi, depicted as 'the beautiful, the strong, the captain'⁴⁹, who fought with the boat of her dead husband against the Ottomans in 1821 - the year established as the beginning of the 'Greek revolution' – and the story of Margarita Basdeki, reproduced from a local Golden Dawn site, who is depicted as a young, 20-year-

⁴⁶ *Do it like in Ancient Sparta* [Καν' το Όπως στην Αρχαία Σπάρτη]. 07.06.2010. Blog Women's Front for the People and the Fatherland.

⁴⁷ *Women of Sparta* [Οι Γυναίκες Της Σπάρτης]. 10.07.2007. Blog Women's Front for the People and the Fatherland.

⁴⁸ *Moscho Tzavela (1760-1803)* [Μόσχω Τζαβέλα (1760-1803)]. 06.08.2007. Blog Women's Front for the People and the Fatherland.

⁴⁹ *Domna Visvisi: The beautiful, the Strong, the Chief-Captain* [Δόμνα Βισβίζη: η Όμορφη, η Δυνατή, η Αρχικαπετάνα]. 19.06.2009. Blog Women's Front for the People and the Fatherland.

old shepherdess, who put on the traditional men's kilt, took a flintlock, fought together with men and even encouraged them during the battle of Makrinitza in 1878⁵⁰.

The list of women warriors includes also figures of the struggles for national expansion in 20th century or of the populations that resided outside the borders of the Greek state and who would – at least at a certain historical point - identify as Greeks, while the regions where they lived, would also be claimed as Greek. Thus, a series of women are praised among the fighters who died during the 'Macedonian struggle', that is the war to incorporate the northern part of today's Greek territory⁵¹. Pontiac Greek women of Santa, in Black Sea, are compared to ancient Amazons and also referred to as an example of heroic warriors, who resisted the conquer and assimilation by 'other races' of the region, described as holding guns and ready to fight at any moment the enemies of their people⁵². What is here noteworthy is that such references are not always original, but reproduced from other websites of the Greek blogosphere, which shows the relation of Women's Front nationalist models to broader nationalist narratives produced and disseminated in the Greek-speaking world the same period when Women's Front operated its blogs.

However, Women's Front mythology of warriors does not consist only of Greek heroic women, while political orientation seems also to play a crucial role in women's mythology. This explains why Greek women who fought as soldiers of ELAS (Greek People's Liberation Army) against Nazi occupation in Greece during the 2nd world war, are omitted from this mythology – ELAS was organized by communists, and communism is articulated as one of the most important political enemies of Golden Dawn, which has been often proved by violent attacks against left activists (Jupskås & Fielitz, 2022). Golden Dawn has not really tried to appropriate the history of resistance against Nazism – neither of the women who took part in it. On the contrary, women's participation (although without frontline fighting) in the nationalist (and anticommunist) organization EOKA in Cyprus, which fought in 1955-56 for independence from the British and for unification with Greece, is glorified⁵³. Moreover, women fighting against communism are idealized in Women's Front. For instance, there is a post referring to the uprising of 1956 in Hungary against Soviet Union – interestingly one of its leaders, Gergely Pongrácz, founded the neo-Nazi party Jobbik in 2003. The post includes a historical photo of the events of the uprising, showing a woman fighter who holds a gun in one of the streets where the battles took place – the picture is captioned 'Better dead than red' (Pict. 7)⁵⁴.

⁵⁰ *Margarita Basdeki* [Μαργαρίτα Μπασδέκη]. 16.02.2009. Blog Women's Front for the People and the Fatherland.

⁵¹ *Women for Macedonia Back Then* [Γυναίκες για τη Μακεδονία Τότε]. 19.06.2010. Blog Women's Front for the People and the Fatherland.

⁵² *Women of Pontiac Santa* [Οι Γυναίκες Της Σάντας Του Πόντου]. 16.06.2010. Blog Women's Front for the People and the Fatherland.

⁵³ *The Woman in EOKA Struggle* [Η Γυναίκα στον Αγώνα της ΕΟΚΑ]. 01.04.2011. Blog Women's Front for the People and the Fatherland.

⁵⁴ *Hungary 1956: Children of Glory* [Ουγγαρία 1956: Τα Τέκνα Της Δόξας]. 01.11.2009. Blog Women's Front for the People and the Fatherland.

Furthermore, in accordance to Golden Dawn's admiration of Nazism, famous Nazi women are praised for their strength and achievements. Hanna Reitsch, the famous woman pilot of the German air-force during second world war and unapologetic supporter of Nazi regime has a special position in Women's Front discourse. A relevant post in Women's Front blog, which praises Reitsch' extra-ordinary skills in piloting and her bravery during the war – e.g. the fact that she flew over occupied Berlin to meet Hitler - is titled 'Great Hanna Reitsch dies' and it ends with the acclamation 'Immortal!' – 'great' and 'immortal': adjectives that imply nothing but respect and admiration to Hanna Reitsch' s face⁵⁵. Moving to post-war fascist influences, Women's Front finds warrior models in the international contemporary ultra-nationalist movement. Here, there is a detailed report on Asgarda, a nationalist women's group in Ukraine, described as reviving the tradition of mythical Amazons by mastering martial arts and 'training paramilitarily and as a community'⁵⁶.

Last, famous women warriors from European history are also introduced in Women's Front as role models for women nationalists. The focus on European history is no coincidence; it suits Golden Dawn's Eurocentric thought and it also serves the narrative of white, European superiority over 'other races'. Jeanne d' Arc, the famous warrior in the Hundred Years' War, is depicted as an embodiment of the national socialist ideals of 'virtue' and 'honor' for women. Her story is here appropriated from a nationalist perspective, as Jean d' Arc is represented as a proper 'nationalist'. She is depicted as an example of devotion to the nation and a woman fighter: her bravery, we read, was greater even than the knights of her time⁵⁷. In accordance to this representation, in May 2017 Irene Dimopoulou Papa, one of the prominent women of Golden Dawn, participated in a nationalist gathering to pay tribute to Jeanne d' Arc in Paris, where she underlined the need for European nations to fight for their continuation and against multicultural Europe⁵⁸.

Concluding remarks

By examining the discursive patterns of violence in Golden Dawn Women's Front blogs, it becomes clear that despite the strict hierarchical and patriarchal relations suggested in the ideology of the party, white nationalist femininity, as propagated by the women's organization, is articulated in an assertive and rather militant way, combining the ideal of motherhood with a readiness for fighting and for exercise of violence in everyday life and in warfare. Such an aspect of Golden Dawn women's collective identity is usually overlooked, although the

⁵⁵ 24/8/1979: *Great Hanna Reitsch Dies* [24/8/1979: Πεθαίνει η Μεγάλη Hanna Reitsch]. 24.08.2011. Blog Women's Front for the People and the Fatherland.

⁵⁶ *Asgarda, Amazons of Ukraine* [Asgarda, Οι Αμαζόνες της Ουκρανίας]. 10.03.2011. Blog Women's Front for the People and the Fatherland.

⁵⁷ *Jean d' Arc* [Ιωάννα της Λωρραίνης]. 15.10.2007. Blog Women's Front for the People and the Fatherland.

⁵⁸ *Hommage à Jeanne d'Arc. Irène Dimopoulou-Pappa. Paris/France - 14 mai 2017*. 15.05.2017. LDC News Agency Youtube Channel.

woman-warrior is a common pattern in the history of national identity construction (Poulos, 2009) and it is worth asking here how local context contributes to the shaping of far-right identities at the national level, potentially normalizing far-right violence - exercised by women or at the eyes of women -, by referring to an - already normalized - common national imaginary. However, Golden Dawn references to women's militancy do not stem only from the Greek nationalist tradition. They also draw on historical and contemporary discourses of the international far-right, which also provide space for women's involvement in violence – embracing and even exercising it.

The usual binary scheme of soldier man-woman mother, which is usually used to explain the imaginary of gender relations in far-right and neo-fascist ideology, needs to be further problematized. Such a binary approach obscures the understanding of gendered identities and activities of women (and men) in far-right groups – more or less inspired by fascist ideology - as well as our understanding of how far-right movements attempt to involve women and/or how women claim a place inside these undoubtedly male-dominated, supra-masculine movements. Especially neo-fascist ideology seems to be more complicated than the dominant interpretation of how gender roles work in it, which potentially opens more space and opportunities for women's action, even aggressive behavior, and participation in crimes, than it is usually believed - with all the contradictions produced by existent patriarchal social relations and norms, reproduced and negotiated in far-right movements too.

Although studying ideology and discourse alone, the question of how they relate to concrete action and praxis of gendered individuals and groups cannot be answered, what is, however, worth considering here is what orientations discourse creates for practice, what norms and limits it poses, explicitly and implicitly, in the production of gendered subjectivities and how it can legitimize and incite exercise or at least acceptance of violence by certain subjects constructed as 'we in danger' against the ones constructed as 'the enemy others'. By studying far-right media, it becomes clear that - against dominant interpretations of violence as a deviant behavior of the individual - violence is constructed and addressed as a collective issue in the far-right and especially in neo-fascist groups, against which subjects are called upon to take (gendered) positions and action, to mobilize as part of the community, and are thus legitimized to exercise violence in order to bring the social solutions proposed. This way violence is given political meaning, and it is therefore necessary to ask what the implications of this politicization of violence can be in the production of gendered identities and militant practices in far-right movements.

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Picture Appendix	
Picture 1 	Picture 2 
Picture 3 	Picture 4 
Picture 5 	Picture 6 
Picture 7 	

Showing (off) violence against women

Discursive constructions of violence against women and girls in an Austrian daily newspaper

Vanessa Siebauer

Abstract

One of the many achievements of the second wave of the women's movement has been to politicize and publicize the seemingly intimate forms of violence against women. Critical psychology holds that psychology is also not a private matter, but deeply political. Thus, a core task of critical psychology is to expose the structural conditions of inequality and oppression that permeate human feeling, thought, and action. One place where power operates, especially in private, is in violence against women, and media discourse is one of the means by which these structures are maintained. Austria has one of the highest rates of violence against women in the European Union, not first, but especially since the spread of SARS-CoV-2 in early 2020: in 2021 alone, 30 femicides were committed in Austria. Since 2020, mass media coverage of violence against women has also increased sharply. While the most visible forms of violence have been the subject of much research, an analysis of the discursive reproduction of structural and symbolic violence in the context of mass media coverage of violence against women is still lacking. This paper aims to fill this gap by conducting a critical discourse analysis of media coverage of violence against women and girls in Austria's largest-circulation daily newspaper, the *Kronen Zeitung*, in January 2022. In order to investigate and show how structural and symbolic violence against women is discursively reproduced in a covert and subtle way, exemplary articles are analyzed and discussed against the background of poststructuralist and deconstructivist accounts of the relationship between discourse and power. In this way, the political impact of these seemingly apolitical discursive acts on the realities of women's lives will be shown.

Keywords

violence against women, discourse analysis, power, structural violence, deconstructionism

1. Introduction

"Well-behaved husband commits atrocity" was the headline of an article in the *Kronen Zeitung*, an Austrian daily newspaper, about the femicide of a woman in Austria on January 16th, 2022. Reading the headline, questions and irritations arise: Why is it about the murderer and husband being well-behaved when he committed a femicide? How can someone who is well-behaved commit femicide in the first place? Why is it even mentioned that the murderer was well-behaved? What is happening in this sentence, in this article about a femicide? What do headlines like this suggest? To answer these questions, it is necessary to look at Austria's social structure on the one hand and violence against women* and the discourse about it on the other. One structural condition is patriarchy, that is, the emergence of violence against women is supported and accepted by the social system of patriarchy.

In this paper, the term violence refers not only to the most commonly perceived form of violence, physical violence, but encompasses all forms of violence that occur in the greatest danger zone for women and girls: the social environment of the private sphere. When violence is referred to in this sense, it includes physical, sexual, psychological, and economic violence as well as structural, discursive, and symbolic violence. It is important to note that violence against women is not perpetrated by anyone or anywhere, but most often by men within the context of intimate partnerships and family environments (see AÖF 2022; Russo et al., 2021). The most subtle and covert forms of violence are symbolic, structural, and institutional violence (cf. Russo et al., 2021), which can be perpetuated through discourse, i.e., hegemonically secured justifications that also find their way into media discourse.

There are now various laws to safeguard women from violence, but in everyday life, violence against women is still protected by social structures and is still mainly perpetrated by men. In 2014, a study by the *European Agency for Fundamental Rights* (FRA, 2014) highlighted that at least one in five women in Europe aged 15 and older has experienced sexual or physical violence by men, mainly in the private sphere. The problem is

in the tradition of Western political thought down to our own days, the way in which the distinction between the public and the private spheres has been drawn has served to confine women, and typically female spheres of activity (...) to the 'private' domain, and to keep them off the public agenda in the liberal state. (Benhabib, 1998, p. 85)

For it is precisely there, "at home", in the "private sphere", that most violence against women takes place, in the vast majority of these cases by (ex-)partners (cf. Russo et al., 2021). Therefore, these forms of violence are often framed as "domestic violence," which, however, obscures the gendered nature of the violent relationship.

These hegemonic phenomena are also (re)produced, (re)constructed, disseminated, and finally received again in discourse. Discourse, in this sense, both produces and mirrors social relations: In media discourse, for example,

women are fundamentally underrepresented both as subjects and as objects of speech and are mostly portrayed in a stereotypically female way. Violence against women also takes place in discourse, for example, when violence against women is reported from a male and androcentric perspective that relegates female voices into the discursive background (cf. Geiger, 2008). In discourse, sexual violence, and physical violence up to femicide are most often reported, and most research also focuses on these direct forms of violence. Cases of violence are portrayed very differently by different media genres, e.g., in quality or tabloid journalism (cf. Meltzer, 2021; Pernegger, 2019). Results of previous research on the reproduction and perpetuation of violence through discourse state that femicides, in particular, are exploited as an extreme form of violence, with many images, large lurid headlines, and stereotypical portrayals that frame the events as tragic individual cases and not structurally classified (cf. Meltzer, 2021; Pernegger, 2019).

Sadly, Austria is now one of the leaders in the *European Union* (EU), when it comes to femicides: "In 2021, there have been 30 cases of murders of women* so far. 29 of them were allegedly committed by their (ex-)partners. These murders are to be understood as femicides: They are committed against women* because they are women*" (Russo et al, 2021, p. 6)¹. Before femicide occurs, it is usually preceded by other forms of violence, for example structural and symbolic violence, which are the most invisible. However, this is rarely addressed, creating a distorted picture of the reality of violence against women. Neglected - especially in tabloid journalism - are the structural conditions for women suffering from violence. Femicides, in particular, are presented as tragic individual cases (cf. Meltzer, 2021). "Accordingly, such a form of reporting does not lead to social and political changes in the long run, but preserves violence against women as a private topic" (Meltzer, 2021, p. 6) - instead, it should be politicized and openly discussed. A structural and symbolic contextualization of the topic in the mass media, or in a representative of the high-circulation and high-reach tabloid journalism in Austria, as found in the case of the *Kronen Zeitung*, is therefore essential. I will therefore explore the question of how violence against women is discursively constructed in the *Kronen Zeitung*. Additionally, I will interrogate the constructions of violence against women and ask how structural aspects on the topic of violence against women are reproduced. In doing so, I address how reality and knowledge about violence against women is (re)produced through (institutionalized) ways of speaking and what is thereby made invisible and obscured – not only in the private, but also in the structural and thus in the political sphere. After reviewing existing work and findings on the topic and presenting theoretical and methodological perspective, I summarize the results of my critical discourse analysis of online articles in the *Kronen Zeitung*. After presenting the research findings, I reflect on my own research process and myself, for which I have provided a separate section.

¹ According to the Autonomous Austrian Women's Shelters (AÖF), 31 murders of women were committed in Austria in 2021, 30 of them presumably by their (ex-)partners, acquaintances or family members. The AÖF also includes so-called extended suicides by men, in which the suspect presumably kills the woman first and then himself.

2. Research background

Since the seemingly private sphere of intimate relationships has been politicized by the women's movement, the political dimension of violence committed in private has also been made visible. Not least in the wake of #metoo, both public and scientific discourse on the diverse forms of violence against women and girls has also surged: "Research, as well as practice and policy on reducing gender-based violence, has undergone significant internationalization in the last 10 to 15 years" (Schrötte, 2019, p. 841). In 2014, *the European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights* (FRA, 2014) conducted the largest study to date on gender-based violence with 42,000 women and shows as a result that "one in three women (33%) has experienced physical and/or sexual violence since she was 15 years old" and "out of all women who have a (current or previous) partner, 22% have experienced physical and/or sexual violence by a partner since the age of 15" (FRA, 2014, p. 15). The authors finally state: Problematic in any case is that

the extent of violence in gender relations can only be approximated by dark field studies (violence prevalence studies), since due to taboos, sexualized violence and violence in couple relationships in particular are largely unreported and thus remain institutionally "invisible". Thus, about 95% of all forced sexual acts are not reported to the police, and the vast majority of cases of domestic violence are not disclosed to the support system or to the police and judiciary. (Schrötte, 2019, p. 835)

With the entry into force of the *Council of Europe Convention on Preventing and Combating Violence against Women and Domestic Violence*, better known as the *Istanbul Convention*, which is "currently the most important legal instrument against violence against women" (AÖF, 2022), the issue received further considerable attention.

The fact that we can talk about violence against women and the different forms of violence stems from the strength and political urgency of the women's movement. Their demand that "the private is political" led to an openly public discourse about "demands for social change, new forms of political participation and the creation of free spaces" (Schulz, 2019, p. 914) - specifically, for example, the right to new abortion legislation. Feminist political engagement unfolded in this movement, expressed in university-based women's and gender studies, among others, which addressed rape and spousal violence (cf. Schulz, 2019, p. 915). "Feminist research exposes the following: violence against women* is primarily violence by male* relationship partners* and ex-partners*. It is mostly perpetrated in the domestic sphere, often systematically over a long period of time" (Russo et al., 2021, p. 24). Moreover, research shows that there are different types of violence - visible and less visible. For example, in their contemporary feminist work, Russo et al. (2021) divide violence against women into psychological, physical, sexual, economic/financial, symbolic, and structural/institutional (pp. 25 - 43). By differentiating the concept of violence or the different types of violence, it can now be researched in a more differentiated and precise way, which can also provide a starting point for psychological

research into different types of violence. As a result of the increased attention, there is a great deal of research on violence against women. For example, based on the representative EU study on this topic, Russo et al. (2021) conclude:

The consequences of violence are profound and far-reaching. Studies prove the sickening effect of violence. In addition to physical injuries and even death, the European FRA study mentions psychological injuries such as depression, anxiety, panic attacks, sleep disorders and chronic pain as a consequence of violent acts. To be added are: Concentration and memory disorders, psychosomatic complaints, lack of self-confidence and sense of self-efficacy, social problems, isolation and difficulties at work that threaten the existence of the victim. (p. 23)

Media discourse on violence against women influences and is part of the reality of violence against women, because discourse not only represents, but above all *constructs* reality. Against the background of such a perspective on discourse, different levels of the construction of knowledge about gender and the body can be identified: the level of representation and normalization (I refer to this as the symbolic level), following Foucault the "body as discursive-media object" (Michaelsen, 2019, p. 1368), and then following Judith Butler the "theory of a performative gender body and of the body as a perception- and reality-generating medium itself" (ibid.). The feminist critique of the representation of women invokes a difference between actual living women and 'the woman' as a (seemingly existing) symbolic image or ideal, thus pointing to the differences between media and political representations/representations and what is represented (cf. Michaelsen, 2019, p. 1369). Thus, there is also a difference between the factually existing violence against women and its representation in the media.

Media coverage on violence against women in Austria has been most exhaustively studied by Maria Pernegger (2022), who analyzed direct violence by means of a content-based text and image analysis of quality and tabloid media. By direct violence, Pernegger means physical, physical, sexual and economic violence. Results of Pernegger's study show that, in a comparison of media coverage, violence against women is reported very differently and that the focus of tabloid journalism is on the extreme case of femicide and that hardly any other forms of violence besides physical violence are included in discourse. Further findings were that even extreme acts of violence are downplayed and, at the same time, dramatized, and portrayed as individual cases and not in the context of structural patriarchal mechanisms of power and domination. Structural and symbolic violence was not examined in the study in the first place.

Another comprehensive study by Christine Meltzer (2021) analyzed discourse in Germany in the form of a systematic content-analytic study of print coverage of violence against women. From 2015 to 2019, Meltzer examined media discourse on violence against women, the study "was limited to physical violence, or threats thereof, coercion, and stalking" (p. 20). Meltzer also concluded that acts of violence against women, particularly femicides, are presented as "tragic individual cases" that must have a high violence component to be published at all. The extreme cases then take up most of the reporting and

lead - also through repetition - to a media bias in the portrayal of violent acts by men against women. Metzler concluded that “revealing patterns behind the (apparent) individual events could create greater sensitivity and thus protection, both for women in violent relationships themselves and for the social environment” (cf. Meltzer, 2021, p. 64). Meltzer thus calls to look at the structural patterns behind violence against women - no matter in which department.

As I have argued above, symbolic violence in the form of (media) discourse is itself a stabilizing factor for these structures. However, before diving into the data, it is important to contextualize the background of the *Kronen Zeitung*, as it occupies a specific position in the canon of Austrian newspapers, being one of the most widely read newspapers and at the same time representing a very specific paper line, which repeatedly points to a diversity of opinion representation, while showing quite strong conservative content.

The *Kronen Zeitung*²

Today's *Kronen Zeitung* has a long history dating back to 1900, of which only a small excerpt can be reproduced here. Today, the *Kronen Zeitung*, known as "Krone" for short, belongs to the *Funke Mediengruppe*, which unites 15 daily newspapers, 21 magazines, 11 radio stations, a weekly newspaper and a book publisher under its central editorial office and according to the *Funke Mediengruppe* website, the focus is on regional media, magazines as well as digital media. The company was founded in 1948 and reaches several million people a day. According to its own information, the media group employs 1,500 journalists and 4,000 "media makers". *Funke Mediengruppe* also owns *Mediaprint GmbH & Co KG*, Austria's largest newspaper and magazine publisher, and is active in advertising, printing and distribution. The managing directors of the *Krone* both sit on the supervisory board of the *Mediaprint* publishing house. There is only one woman on the Supervisory Board, otherwise eight men. Although the *Krone's* mission statement is "diversity of opinion of the editors and journalists" (*Kronen Zeitung*, 2022), the masthead lists no one except the aforementioned eight men and one woman from the supervisory board; moreover, two of them also head the publishing house in which it is published. Despite declining print figures, the *Kronen Zeitung* is the Austrian daily newspaper with the highest circulation (*Statista*, 2022b) - it also continues to expand digitally, in addition to a news channel that has existed since 2020. The *Mediaprint* publishing house, founded in 1988 when the *Kronen Zeitung* and *Kurier* - another Austrian daily newspaper - merged, dominates the market with the *Kronen Zeitung* and *Kurier*, especially in Austria (*Statista*, 2022c). *Kronen Zeitung* is owned by Christoph Dichand, son of founder Hans Dichand, and *Funke Mediengruppe*, while *Mediaprint GmbH* is also owned by *Funke Mediengruppe* and Hans Dichand's family, but additionally by *Raiffeisen Bankengruppe*, the largest banking group in Austria. *Mediaprint* represents the

² "Krone" can be translated as "crown".

second largest media group in Austria after *Österreichischer Rundfunk (ORF)*³. At the beginning of 2022, an estimated nine million people lived in Austria (see Statista, 2022a). According to a media analysis in Austria (Media Analyse, 2021), the printed *Kronen Zeitung* alone, at 23.3%, reaches almost a quarter of Austrians, especially people with a low level of schooling from lower social classes and especially older people. It is also published in regional editions for each of the nine federal provinces⁴. The *Kronen Zeitung* is not a member of the *Austrian Press Council*. The newspaper has had repeated conflicts with the Press Council and does not accept it, which is also not mandatory in Austria - but the latter issues guidelines for dealing with violence in reporting. In 2021 alone, the *Kronen Zeitung* violated the guidelines of the Austrian Press Council nine times (out of a total of 31 times in 2021, or 29.03%), and 111 cases (out of a total of 647, or 17.06%) were reported to the Press Council in relation to the *Kronen Zeitung* - the highest number of any newspaper in Austria (Presserat, 2021a). This means that around one-third of all violations of the *Austrian Press Council's* guidelines in 2021 were committed by the *Kronen Zeitung*. The violations in 2021 included coverage of a terrorist attack in Vienna, multiple uncensored publications of pictures of victims of terror and violence, details about the killing of a child, the unnecessary use of the migration background of a nine-year-old child, the publication of various accident videos resulting in death, the unlabeled advertisement for a casino, the designation of the unvaccinated as enemies of the people, violations of the protection of personality, and finally the publication of an uncensored photo of a femicide victim (cf. Press Council, 2021b). Due to its political power, high circulation and reach, and violations of ethical reporting, the *Kronen Zeitung* has a major influence on how reporting on violence against women spreads in Austria, and how violence is portrayed and perceived.

3. Discourse, knowledge, and power

In order to analyze the media reports and provide a theoretical framework for this work, I draw on poststructuralism. There is no single concept of "poststructuralism"; rather, it is a conglomeration of many different perspectives. Nevertheless, there are core characteristics of poststructuralism that I rely on. These can be described as a rejection of objectivity, including the conception of a single reality and truth. Poststructuralism is based on the social constructivist concept of meaning, which means that subjects construct "truth" or "reality" on the basis of larger structures and patterns of thought and (also) through language, which, bound up in discourses, carries knowledge in and with it, knowledge being interlocked with power. This gives rise to these three spheres: Discourse, knowledge and power, which socially construct and also structure our societies; they are construct and constructing element, structure and structuring element in

³ ORF is a "public service program on television, radio and online. More than 90% of Austrians use one of ORF's offerings every day" (ORF, 2022).

⁴ Austria consists of nine federal states: Vorarlberg, Tyrol, Salzburg, Carinthia, Styria, Upper Austria, Lower Austria, Vienna and Burgenland.

one. Thus, subjects (e.g.: people, women) and realities (e.g.: violence against women) are also discursively produced and do not exist *a priori* - which makes poststructuralist theories especially useful for gender studies (cf. Kleiner & Dinsleder, 2017). In the context of this work, this means that violence against women also does not exist *a priori*, "just like that," but that violence against women is "the result of powerful knowledge politics that are subject to performative shifts" (Bublitz, 2019, p. 374). Before I briefly discuss *Critical Discourse Research* (CDR) as an instrument of power critique and as a methodological tool for analysis, I will take a closer look at the notions of discourse, knowledge, and power.

Discourse refers to the totality of all discursive practices (e.g.: performance) and thus can never be captured in its entirety; rather, it can be understood as a "discursive teeming" (Jäger, 2007). The poststructuralist concept of discourse is characterized by its dynamism. It vehemently argues against a reductionist, exclusively descriptive view of discourse; instead, it posits that discourse thrives on constant change and updating by participants and the discursive power that develops through context and speakers. Discourses are not unanimous or congruent: rather, they contradict, misunderstand, complement, disagree. Margarethe and Siegfried Jäger (2015) also refer to this as a "discursive struggle" (Jäger, 2015). According to this, it is a power struggle that is extremely dynamic, although it (seems) static-descriptive. However, discourse is realized through performance, which has implications for the discourse subjects, in this case the women who are or have been affected by violence and who are or have been reported on. Discourse also refers to what is not said - for example, who or what is given less space, who or what has - in other words - less power? Or, what doesn't need to be said at all, what is still understandable? And how are the topics (re)presented? Which structures of power play a role in this? What do the historical-concrete conditions have to do with it? In the sense of poststructuralism, our knowledge is historically produced, at a certain time in a certain place by certain people.

Margarethe and Siegfried Jäger also describe discourse in the tradition of Foucault as the "flow of knowledge through time" (Jäger, 2007, p. 15). Discourse is thus what connects us when we transport knowledge (through language) through our (social) discursive networks - as a simple example, consider a newspaper like the *Kronen Zeitung*. Behind a newspaper, there are historical-structural conditions, a socio-political attitude or way of thinking, also the financiers have influence and those responsible have power. Within this framework, knowledge is constantly negotiated - for example, what is considered true or normal and what is not. On the one hand, the negotiated knowledge itself is drawn from the discursive web; on the other hand, the processing and negotiation of knowledge constantly creates new (knowledge) that circles back into the discursive web. However, knowledge is not de-contextual but follows power structures and knowledge politics that already exist and are discursively reproduced.

In the context of this paper, patriarchal structures are understood as such. Like discourse and knowledge, power does not exist in a decontextualized

manner but requires the exercise of someone or something over someone or something. The maintenance of power in this context can be achieved through disciplining, rules, prohibitions, controls, and punishments, that is, through the exercise of force. However, even when there is no structural or institutional punishment, social values and norms are permeated by the force field of power. According to Foucault, power structures become visible where they generate resistance (Foucault, 1982, p. 243). This resistance, in the poststructuralist sense, also enables the new, enables the change of existing relations. When a discourse is examined, this always allows conclusions to be drawn about social power structures. Discourses are thus specific spaces of the sayable and knowable. "The power effect of discourses is generated from the containment of sayability and knowability, speaker subjectivity, as well as the coupling surfaces to action" (Link, 2008, p. 118). These meta-theoretical considerations are relevant in relation to the problem area of violence against women insofar as

Violence, and especially violence against women*, is embedded in a thoroughly patriarchal social system. Patriarchy represents a form of social organization and a value system that favors men* in the state, family, and other institutions and gives them the more powerful position - over women* and non-normative gender identities (Russo et al., 2021, p. 8).

In the course of the analysis, I will therefore repeatedly refer to the hegemonic and thus gendered distribution of violence against women.

4. Research process

Critical discourse research (CDR) is to be understood as an instrument of power critique that contributes to deconstructing discourses and making the interwoven structures of discourse, power and knowledge comprehensible. Originating with Foucault, CDR was further developed - among many others - by Siegfried and Margarethe Jäger (cf. 2007; 2015), finding its way to an increasingly elaborated form to become more accessible to academic researchers. Central to CDR is that its research questions are situated in social problem areas, that it asks decidedly about disadvantage and discrimination, and that it seeks to pursue a critique of power and domination. Thus, because of the many different streams in CDR, the researcher can assemble a toolbox (cf. Jäger, 2007) to the best of their ability to conduct research according to desired characteristics, as CDR operates in an interdisciplinary field. Thus, CDR does not begin with the initial macro-analysis, but with the preliminary thinking of the entire research. The research process is then divided into different steps.

A total of 114 articles finally found their way into the macro-analysis. In the end, only those articles explicitly dealing with violence against women were considered. After the macro-analysis of the 114 articles, 30 of them were selected for micro-analysis, 23 of which were short news stories that were only a few lines long. Therefore, I selected seven main articles, all of which were about a total of two femicides in Austria, three of the articles about the first femicide, and

four articles about the second femicide. These are also the articles that are seen or read most quickly and create a bias in terms of (stereotypical) portrayal of violence against women. These seven articles were about two femicides, both committed by male relatives in January against a woman and a girl, respectively. The first femicide occurred on January 8th, and was covered in three articles; the second femicide occurred on January 12th, and received 4 articles. The articles range from one page to three pages. In these seven articles, different authors report on the femicides and especially on the background. To better understand the findings, I will briefly introduce the two femicides here. The first femicide of a woman was committed in the shared apartment, in the living room, by the husband. The killer shot his wife in the back of the head with a pistol, while she was sitting at the dining room table and the children were nearby. The second femicide of a girl was committed by the girl's father on railroad tracks. The perpetrator forced her to go with him on the tracks and then murdered her. The killer had already been known to the judiciary, as he had threatened to kill his daughter and had stalked the girl's mother in the past.

5. Results

In the newspaper, a distinction is made between domestic and foreign countries; domestic means Austria, foreign means all other countries. Results of the macroanalysis reveal that there was also reporting on violence in other countries, especially Great Britain and the United States of America, in connection with Jeffrey Epstein, Ghislaine Maxwell and Prince Andrew⁵. The Church and the Pope were also key social actors that were reported on.⁶ Otherwise, articles related to femicides, cases of violence, or new information on old cases that had not yet been solved. The topic of stalking was also covered. Articles about violence against women in Austria appeared most frequently in the form of small articles that are only a few sentences long and usually do not contain pictures. Most dealt with physical violence, often with knives or firearms, or with threats of violence or femicide; they also addressed economic violence and police measures; the large articles then dealt mainly with domestic femicides - in the past as well as in the present. A structural understanding of femicides is sometimes found in separate supplemental articles on the site that feature experts and present statistics. These articles were not, as in the many short and few large ones, about the act or the course of events from the male point of view, but about the social context of the topic and the fact that Austria is such a negative pioneer.

⁵ Jeffrey Epstein was a sex offender and maintained a sexual abuse ring of underage girls with his girlfriend and accomplice, Ghislaine Maxwell. The allegations range from human trafficking, sexual exploitation and coercion into prostitution to rape. Prince Andrew of England is also alleged to have had sex with a minor but, like Epstein before him, was able to settle out of court with the victims and/or the prosecution (Der Standard, 2021a)

⁶ Pope Emeritus Joseph Ratzinger has made a false statement about his knowledge of abuse in the church. An abuse report states that there were at least 500 cases of sexual abuse in the Catholic Archdiocese of Munich/Freising. The expert report concludes that Pope Benedict, then Cardinal Ratzinger, attended a meeting in which it was decided that a pedophile priest could continue to work as a pastor, whereupon he continued to abuse children (Der Standard, 2022).

Topics of the articles that structurally classify and reflexively deal with violence against women were mostly women's protection, the "Million Violence Protection Package"⁷, femicides committed by men last year ("Chronology of Horror")⁸, interviews with experts⁹, political protest, statistics on the topic and research projects. The murders were not usually referred to as femicides; only once (in one of the structurally classifying articles) was the word "femicide" used. Apart from this instance, they were referred to as "acts of blood," "horrific explosions of violence," "marital dramas," "acts of madness," etc. In the cases covered in the *Kronen Zeitung*, the perpetrator usually came from the immediate environment of the woman affected by violence or ultimately murdered. In the articles, the emphasis was often on describing the act as "dramatic," "inconceivable." The "ethnic origin" of the perpetrator was regularly mentioned. In some cases, "origin" was also mentioned for the women involved, but much more frequently for the perpetrators. Almost as important as origin was occupation - again, that of the perpetrator, not that of the murdered person. Separation or divorce were often stylized as the "reason" why women were threatened, stalked or then subjected to physical or economic violence by their (ex-)partner. This was also reflected in the headlines, for example: "Infidelity with nasty consequences", "Love whispering", "Love whispering led to illegal weapons".

Several characteristics emerged during the subsequent microanalysis. The results are divided into commonalities and differences, followed by a brief summary.

For ease of reading, I first list the articles by title and coding, and then at the end of each section I provide selected representative quotations from some of the articles from whose analysis I drew my findings.

Femicide 1

1. Article 1 (Fem1/Art1, 10/01/2022): *Forester shoots woman at kitchen table*
2. Article 2 (Fem1/Art2, 11/01/2022): *Woman shot dead: Family wanted to emigrate to Sweden*
3. Article 3 (Fem1/Art3, 01/16/2022): *The cruelty of a good husband*

Femicide 2

⁷ The government in Austria adopted a violence protection package for women in 2021 which includes mandatory work with and an automatic weapons ban for dangerous persons, an increase in the number of trained prevention officers, and the strengthening of police case conferences for high-risk cases - with 24.6 million euros.

⁸ According to the AÖF, 31 murders of women were committed in 2021, 30 of which were allegedly committed by the ex(partner), an acquaintance or a family member. "In the last ten years, according to Raab (Federal Minister for Women, Family, Integration and Media, note), there were 319 murders and 458 attempted murders of women. The peak was in 2019 with 43 murders" (ORF, 2021).

⁹ For example, with Maria Rösslhumer, the managing director of AÖF and head of the Women's Telephone Against Violence and board member of the Austrian Women's Ring, who was awarded the Austrian Human Rights Award 2020 for her extraordinary commitment to women and children affected by violence.

1. Article 1 (Fem2/Art1, 13.01.2022): *Father threw himself in front of the train with daughter (6)*
2. Article 2 (Fem2/Art2, 14.01.2022): *"We are at the end of our rope".*
3. Article 3 (Fem2/Art3, 01/15/2022): *Put on rails with daughter (6): Perpetrator stalked family for years!*
4. Article 4 (Fem2/Art4, Jan. 25, 2022): *Justitia now has a lot of explaining to do*

Similarities

The murderer

The perpetrator is rarely if ever named as the perpetrator or the murderer or the guilty party, but always as a private person who is a father, likes to play tennis, is a forester and so on. In this way, the perpetrator is normalized via profession and hobby and not via the core of the matter, namely that he committed a woman's murder. Moreover, the act and the perpetrator are often discursively separated: the perpetrators in the text are perpetrators by the attributions of action, but they are not named as such (perpetrator, murderer, guilty), e.g.: "good husband commits atrocity." The murderer, his perspective and narrative are given more space than the woman or girl. He is mostly connoted positively, constructed with "good" qualities. Examples include these or similar descriptions:

1. The former forester - who until recently was employed by the Federal Forests - took his Glock 17 registered to him and shot his wife, who was sitting at the dining table, in the back of the head." (Fem1/Art1, 10.01.2022).
2. Farmer Josef R. (88) was friends with Daniel S.: "He was a pleasant, quiet person. He came from northern Germany, originally learned gunsmithing and then changed professions because he had no future. We often talked about forestry things. She [the murdered woman] learned forest education some time ago and worked in schools" (Fem1/Art1, 10.01.2022).
3. Well-mannered husband commits atrocity (Fem1/Art3, 01/16/2022).
4. [...] as reported, the 38-year-old amateur tennis player had thrown himself and his own daughter in front of an express train on Tuesday evening not far from the southern railway station near Sollenau (Fem2/Art2, 14.01.2022).

The murdered woman or girl

The woman and the girl are very passive in the text and are therefore presented as less relevant than the murderer's narrative. They are often constructed stereotypically, in a way that has negative connotations. While the murderer is often associated with his profession, the woman or girl is constructed as a mother or daughter, that is, only in relation to and dependent on the man. The victim might be described in the following ways:

1. So, she was a single mother when she looked for a partner on an Internet platform in 2006. There she came into contact with Daniel S.. A German, a gunsmith by profession (Fem1/Art3, 01/16/2022).
2. Sometimes the woman's voice could be heard from the estate. When she scolded, "probably with her daughters and sons, but with a mother of five children, sometimes the nerves can be on edge" (Fem1/Art3, 16.01.2022).
3. Apparently, the enthusiastic amateur tennis player and his beautiful ex-partner (33) - she once won a beauty contest and also took part in the competition for the most beautiful woman in Austria - had separated. (Fem2/Art1, 01/13/2022).

The search for meaning or the production of meaning

In addition, the "search for meaning" or "the question of why" was a common feature: a narrative is created through marginal information, certain parts are particularly staged or emphasized. Speculations from close people are often used to create a meaningful narrative. It became apparent that the narrative of femicide - albeit constructed from the perspective of the perpetrator - served as a kind of explanation for the femicide in order to be able to classify the act in such a way that it made "sense." The more "sensible" and "normal" the perpetrator and the course of events appeared, the easier it was made for the readership to understand and thus ultimately (socially) process. The "search for meaning" became implicitly and explicitly visible: Either all means were used to try to establish (speculative) connections of meaning, or the "why" was explicitly asked. Furthermore, it could be observed that the narrative took over the supporting role for normalization processes: Through the narrative, justifications and linkages could be created and legitimized. Depending on the narrative, the act of femicide was justified by different aspects and made comprehensible for the readers or not. In this work, normalization contrasts with dramatization: the more dramatized through word choice and stylistic devices, the more "abnormal" the narrative and the femicide were classified.

The search for meaning could take these or similar forms:

1. In front of the entrance of the neat house in Weißenkirchen im Attergau are candles, next to them are flowers. The testimony that something terrible must have happened [...]. In this family, which - according to the neighbors - had been considered a "model family". Nevertheless, from time to time the voice of the woman could be heard from the estate. When she scolded, "probably with her daughters and sons, but with a mother of five children, sometimes the nerves are on edge." They were considered a "perfect couple." And otherwise? "No, there was nothing noticeable." No one wants to have heard anything about quarrels between the couple. And besides, the two would have been a perfect match in their contrasts: She, the extrovert. He, the quiet one. And then the incomprehensible: HE killed HER at 2:44 p.m. on January 8." (Fem1/Art3, 01/16/2022).
2. "My relationship with Simone was not as happy as everyone thought," the 46-year-old said when asked, "especially in the last few weeks it was conflictual." Why, why, why? (Fem1/Art3, 01/16/2022).

3. When officers arrived on the scene shortly thereafter, he was already standing in front of his house with his hands up. Why? Why this terrible crime? (Fem1/Art3, 01/16/2022).

The psychological

It was also apparent that mental impairments or incidents were presented in a stigmatized way. In two cases, mental illness was brought into play and stigmatized: Either it was directly interpreted as a weakness - this was the case with the murdered woman - or it was seen as abnormal and a possible reason for someone to commit a crime - this was the case with the murderer who killed his daughter:

1. A plan that sent Simone S. into a panic. Like the first trip to her "dream destination" when the family's van got "stuck" in a tunnel due to a traffic jam, she then completely freaked out, jumped out of the car and hysterically screamed for help. (Fem1/Art3, 01/16/2022).
2. Alex V. probably deliberately drove his little girl to her death. Now, piece by piece, what can be called a collective failure is coming together. The psychogram of a stalker that makes you shudder. (Fem2/Art3, 01/15/2022).

Other

Moreover, femicides were not named as such; they were called "acts of blood," "atrocities," and "acts of madness." The articles were often characterized by the tragic individual case portrayal (cf. Meltzer, 2021), which failed to classify femicides structurally or even to place them in a larger than private context. Moreover, facts were often constructed dichotomously, i.e., in two ways: normal vs. abnormal, good vs. bad, right vs. wrong. The balance between these dichotomies then becomes either inadequate or one-sided. This can be seen, for example, in the fact that an act can be abnormal, but the perpetrator normal: this leads to a narrative conflict ("good husband commits atrocity") that becomes irritating: How can a good husband commit an atrocity? Examples include the following:

1. Because the couple has five children aged seven to 18 years, who were present at the bloody deed! Saturday afternoon around 4.45pm ends an apparently for years smoldering relationship dispute of the married couple Daniel (46) and Simone S. (42) in any case in a terrible explosion of violence. (Fem1/Art1, 10.01.2022).
2. They still wanted to emigrate to Sweden together - but instead it came to a bloody marriage drama: the forester Daniel S. (46) is reported to have literally executed his wife Simone S. (42) at the kitchen table in the smart house in Weißenkirchen im Attergau. (Fem1/Art2, 11.01.2022).
3. And besides, the two of them would have been a perfect match in their contrasts: She, the extrovert. He, the quiet one. And then the incomprehensible: HE killed HER at 2:44 p.m. on Jan. 8. In front of her eldest son. The high school student was

sitting at the dinner table. His mother stood next to him and prepared a snack. Suddenly, Daniel S. came into the room and reportedly yelled, "You destroyed my life!" - Before putting a bullet in the back of his wife's head with a handgun. (Fem1/Art3, 01/16/2022).

4. Father throws himself in front of train with daughter (6): drama at the tracks of the southern railroad. (Fem2/Art1, 01/13/2022).

5. HORROR ACT: Put on rails with daughter (6): Perpetrator stalked family for years! (Fem2/Art3, 01/15/2022).

Differences

(Female) experts

The two femicides and the articles about them differ quite clearly in the appearance of experts and thus in the structural classification of the femicide. While in respect to the first femicide, not a single expert appears in the three articles, in the articles about the second femicide, two experts are given space in two articles. The inclusion of (female) experts had the effect of drawing attention to structural conditions, thus moving the femicides away from the "tragic individual case" to a social, systemic problem. The appearance of neighbors, friends, acquaintances, and confidants had the opposite effect: this gave great weight to individual accounts, and the narrative could be further expanded with regard to the significance of the crime from the perpetrator's point of view. Experts thus had great influence and power in the text. Examples of the latter include the already cited quote by farmer Josef R. (88) and the following:

1. But it was obvious that there was a crisis behind the perfect family façade: the couple would have shouted at each other again and again. Daniel S.'s evening ritual: He came home, sat in the trunk of his car, listened to music and drank beer. He had probably been unemployed for about three weeks. Maybe the final trigger... (Fem1/Art1, 10.01.2022).

2. "No, there was nothing to notice." Nobody wants to have noticed anything about quarrels between the couple. (Fem1/Art3, 01/16/2022).

Examples of experts include the following:

1. Now the public prosecutor's office checks not only whether the requirements have been met, but also whether a report has been made to the guardianship court. "With this," knows Sabine Matjeka, chairwoman of the association of judges, "a change in custody is currently only made upon request, usually by one parent." Since the courts are not networked with each other, automatic endangerment notifications do not take place - for "data protection reasons"! However, according to the Federal Child and Youth Welfare Act, employees of courts and public prosecutor's offices are obligated to "immediately report in writing to the locally responsible authorities if there is a reasonable suspicion that children are being abused, tortured, neglected - or otherwise endangered in their well-being" (Fem2/Art4, 25.01.2022).

2. "Many questions remain unanswered; the public prosecutor's office Wiener Neustadt will now take care of the answers. Investigations are underway, but first, says spokesman Habitzl, they want to wait for the final report of the police. There is even a threat of charges against the court staff." (Fem2/Art4, 01/25/2022).

Language

Finally, the narrative was significantly influenced by dramatizing elements that were found in every text without exception. These were not only speculative links, but also incomplete sentences ("Why, why, why?"), work with capital letters ("HE killed HER at 2:44 p.m. on January 8th"), and the frequent use of punctuation:

1. And then the unbelievable: HE killed HER on January 8 at 2:44 pm. In front of the eyes of THEIR oldest boy. The high school student was sitting at the dinner table. His mother stood next to him and prepared a snack. Suddenly, Daniel S. came into the room and reportedly yelled, "You ruined my life!" - Before putting a bullet in the back of his wife's head with a handgun. (Fem1/Art3, 01/16/2022).
2. And when officers arrived on the scene shortly after, he was already standing in front of his house with his hands up. Why? Why this terrible crime? (Fem1/Art3, 01/16/2022).
3. "My relationship with Simone wasn't as happy as everyone thought," the 46-year-old said in the interrogation, "especially in the last weeks it was conflictual." Why, why, why? Co-witnesses of the couple believe they have explanations for the drama. (Fem1/Art3, 01/16/2022).

Space and images

Either very large pictures of the house, the family with children, the murdered woman, the murderer, and the place where the femicide occurred are shown, taking up most of the space allocated for the femicide, usually half the space or more, or small or no or few pictures are combined with a smaller text or space in general. The larger the space and images were, the more dramatic (linguistically) the text was.

6. Discussion

On the one hand, the discourse analysis was able to replicate earlier findings and, on the other, to gain new insights. The demand of the second women's movement is still highly topical, as can be seen from the results. Both femicides were committed in private settings and were also subsequently presented in the *Kronen Zeitung* predominantly as tragic individual cases and not placed in a political context. One article - (Fem2/Art4, 25.01.2022): "Justitia now has a lot of explaining to do" - clearly stands out from the others, though: In it, two (female)

experts have their say, classifying femicide structurally. The feminist critique of the (re)presentation of murdered women and girls also applies here: they are strongly underrepresented and disappear in the discursive background in favor of the male perspective. Moreover, they are stereotypically portrayed, which creates a difference between the media portrayal of violence against women and the violence actually perpetrated by men. If these very mechanisms are not made visible, violence against women cannot be adequately explored and received in the context of power. In the texts, this was almost never the case: instead of illuminating the patterns and structures behind men's acts, the authors opted for idiosyncratic, male perspectives or created narratives based on them that were offered to the readership. However, discourse analysis allows us to understand these articles not as expressions of individual authors' perspectives but as text through which a social order and power structures are manifested and, at the same time, perpetuated.

It is paramount to understand how this (re-)production of existing social relations is achieved discursively. Most significant in this regard, in my view, is the normalization of the perpetrator on the basis of neighbors, friends, acquaintances, etc., to whom it seems unimaginable that a "normal" man would do something so "unimaginable." In this way, what is common in (discursive) reality happens: if something does not fit the socially shared values and norms, it is more difficult to understand and must be made understandable accordingly. This psychological effect is also very clearly evident in the search for meaning in the act or in the perpetrator himself, but not - which would be much more complex - in the structural-institutional reality, which is much more confusing and complicated to understand and present than a subjectively based individual perspective. This tendency of "simplification" can also be observed in dealing with the "psychological". Either psychological characteristics have been declared in a reductionist way as weakness (in the case of women) or as a reason to become and be violent (in the case of men) - which is clearly stigmatizing and also stereotyping.

Very important is the realization in relation to the (female) experts who speak in the articles. Although this idea is so simple, it shows a strong effect: as soon as female experts appeared, the femicides, but also what had happened before, were structurally classified, placed in a decided context that could make comprehensible where and at what point what had to be done. In favor of the expertise, the narrative with its many speculations took a back seat, so that the influence on the overall picture and thus also its inherent political power became clear. The results on the "structural" aspect show that it is difficult to grasp, understand and describe complex structures linguistically and intellectually. Even experts refer to institutions and laws when they speak of structural conditions. Since it is not really possible to grasp what "the structural" actually is, it makes sense to reduce the complex reality and prefer simpler ideas and solutions. However, this effect also leads to an individualization of such cases. At the same time, violence against women is also individualized, leading to less acceptance that women are structurally disadvantaged, and this is one of the reasons why so much violence against women can go unchecked. This also includes the symbolic

violence that is exercised and reproduced here in the *Kronen Zeitung* and the portrayal of femicides, under the protective cloak of the powerful newspaper in the powerful publishing and printing house by predominantly men. The symbolic violence here is reinforced by the underrepresentation of the "structural," by the use of male narratives and stereotyping. The two indirect forms of violence, the structural and the symbolic, are thus constructed, represented, disseminated and received via Austria's daily newspaper with the highest circulation and reach. The study shows that the (very simple) use of female experts already makes a major contribution to improving the representation of violence against women in the media. At the same time, the results show that - despite its unbroken relevance - it is important to shift the focus from the much-cited direct violence to indirect violence, as this is, among other things, the basis for how people perceive violence against women in the media in the first place, which can then result in cognitions, emotions and behavior - which is then either structurally trained or individually shaped. At the same time, the article shows that it is also important in discourse research to find clear ways to study phenomena that are very difficult to grasp cognitively and linguistically; in this case structures, that are also practicable for less experienced researchers.

7. Leveled structural conditions I feel in my own body: from where I speak. An autobiographical self-reflection.

Throughout the project researching violence against women, I was involved in regular meetings where we also had the opportunity to reflect and exchange ideas. In the beginning, I was so excited about the great team and the exciting work that I left my own experiences of violence out of it, as I preferred to process them myself. However, as time went on, I became physically and psychologically worse, which had other causes, such as a move, the death of a loved one, severe pain in my abdomen due to various triggers. After my condition worsened significantly, it became more and more difficult for me to continue working on this stressful issue. For the macroanalysis I had to carefully read, record, categorize and analyze in detail the articles about violence in the *Kronen Zeitung* - which turned out to be very difficult when confronted with this mass of violent cases, especially since I had already experienced sexual and physical violence myself, which was also the topic of most of the articles. At some point I could not and did not want to continue, which made me feel guilty as a researcher because the topic is highly relevant and I wanted to write this paper, which is my first. Moreover, my three colleagues were already further along in their research, so I imposed additional pressure on myself to perform in the neoliberal sense. I was trapped in powerful structures.

The "solution" soon became apparent: at some point I could no longer hold back and hide, and at one of the meetings I blurted out that I felt bad and why. We talked for over an hour and began to think about how the psychological (protective) processes might have prevented us from addressing stressful issues ourselves. We began to discuss how to protect ourselves and how to deal with the

emotions that came up during our research as women about violence against women - including what coping strategies we developed. These were mostly action-oriented: from political activism to shouting out anger, to speaking up and engaging in discourses that were uncomfortable, and even more so, going into research about it. These are just some of them. I, too, as a student, as a scholar, as a human being, as a woman, am implicated in powerful structures that I reproduce and try to reflect through this work. After the macro- and microanalysis, I have additionally written two reflections that also shed light on the work I did during the Corona pandemic - completely isolated, from home, behind the laptop - and what that can mean for research on social problem issues. Especially with the ("self-evident") scientific claim to be neutral and objective, there were inner conflicts, although I reflected on this from a socio-critical perspective. Emotions rose in me, especially anger, but also bewilderment and above all helplessness in the face of these powerful structures that produce so much violence, that often seem so unchangeable and rigid. At the same time, this "outing" as a scientist is difficult because it could diminish my own qualifications. Nevertheless, I decided to include this reflection section and reflect on my point of view or situatedness. Away from the research world, I also noticed other changes in my behavior toward men in my personal life when they approached me or physically touched me, even if only on the arm. I noticed that my emotions became stronger depending on how much and how intensely I had engaged with the many articles due to my research. The more I was "in," the harder it was for me to distance myself and keep my emotions under control. The more I was "out", the more the strong focus on the negative emotions gave way. So in the end, this work took much longer than I thought it would, because it was important to keep distancing myself from the material, reflecting on it, and communicating with someone about it. From the microanalysis on, when I was allowed to immerse myself in the material, it was much easier for me to (continue) working, because I was no longer hit by this sheer mass of violent cases, all reported in a similar way, which had created this powerlessness in me. Especially when you are sitting alone behind a computer, have little social contact and are not supposed to have it due to a global pandemic, the direct exchange with fellow researchers about issues you need to reflect on and communicate as if you were affected yourself suffers. Considering that research results show that at least one in five women older than 15 has already experienced physical or sexual violence, I conclude that many women researching on violence against women have also had to experience violence themselves, which must be reflected on in any case - in the optimal case - also to protect the researcher and offer her a safe framework to research socio-critical topics out of her own affectedness and thus participate in a dynamic process of change. Unfortunately, this can also lead to the fact that (especially) as a woman in a male connoted field (the sciences) the competences (seriousness, objectivity - male connoted attributes) are denied, should one bring one's own subjective experiences into the scientific process, e.g., by reflecting on the circumstances and one's own situatedness. With this I would like to give an example for doing it anyway.

8. Conclusion

As this paper shows, research on socio-critical and politically embedded content is always also research on the self and the social environment, and therefore cannot be artificially separated from the embedding in the environment. This is exactly what natural science demands - thus also a part of psychology, the institutionalized natural scientific psychology. It is required to be neutral and objective, to control the experimental conditions, to experiment in artificially produced settings, and then to generalize the results as well as possible to the environment.

In contrast, it is important to support people in their research who are interactively connected to their socio-critical research object through their own potential discrimination mechanisms, i.e. who conduct research out of their own concern. Based on the self-reflexive reappraisal of one's own resistances, it becomes clear how much work still needs to be done with regard to the perception and awareness of one's own situatedness and the emotions, cognitions, and behaviors associated with it in research on violence against women. It is not only important to learn about one's own situation - that is, psychoeducation with regard to structural conditions - but also to be able to apply this knowledge in practice under guidance or supervision. For this purpose, it would be more than desirable to establish a platform or a network that on the one hand collects the necessary knowledge about (e.g. one's own situation or psychological mechanisms of women affected by violence), but on the other hand also connects younger women with already more experienced affected women in order to generate an interactive, supportive network out of one's own affectedness - an act of empowerment. This could also result in regular meetings or gatherings with specific agendas. This would be desirable not only with regard to the intersectional discrimination category "gender", but also for researchers who are affected multiple times or by other discrimination structures. As in any other social field, it is important in research on violence against women in psychology to have role models, i.e., women who have experienced violence themselves, who can communicate openly about it and thus become visible to other younger and subsequent researchers and encourage them to participate. Another practical step that can be derived from this paper is the targeted use of (female) experts. Here, too, it is important to show that what happened is not subjectively classified as an individual case, but that an attempt is made to place it in a broader and generally structured socio-critical context through female experts. It would also be desirable here to have female experts, since they are underrepresented in the media. Unfortunately, what this work could not do is a broader and deeper analysis in terms of structural and symbolic violence, its construction, reproduction and very importantly: reception. An intriguing question in this context would be, for example: How do women affected by violence respond to the structural and symbolic components of violence when confronted with articles about violence against women? In summary, violence against women is a highly topical political problem that should by no means remain hidden, which is why more research on it should be encouraged or

decidedly guided. In addition, it is necessary to subsequently bring the research to the public in an understandable form, so that it does not remain only in the academic sphere. It would also be important to increase the involvement of the public and private media landscapes, so that there is regular reflection on violence against women in all media, led by experts and those affected. The majority of reporting on violence against women must not be done by people who are untrained (in relation to the topic of gender-based violence), but on the basis of professional, networked, affected women and researchers. This is because public perceptions and discourse about violence against women also contribute to violence against women, as this paper makes clear.

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Researching gender relations with youth – Reflections on the attempt to conduct a subject-scientific and participative research project

Marlene Märker

Abstract

Subject-scientific and participative approaches both strive for co-research to involve life-world experts in the research process. The goal is to jointly work toward gaining a deeper understanding of social reality as well as changing it. These approaches are challenging and require constant reflection on the process. This article revisits a study that aimed to follow subject-scientific and participative approaches conducted by a colleague and myself. Using the photovoice method, we asked how the youth co-researchers perceived gender relations. To explore how subject-scientific and participative approaches can be combined, I reflect on specific research experiences and their potentials as well as the research dilemmas that arose from these claims. First, I describe both approaches to elaborate on the potentials and challenges in the context of such research. In particular, I illuminate the school as a restrictive research field and highlight how focusing on the agency of all co-researchers can enable approaches for socio-critical research from the subject's standpoint.

Keywords

Gender relations, Critical Psychology, subject-scientific research, participative research, photovoice

1. Introduction

Children and adolescents acquire their knowledge in societies that are shaped by historical relations of inequality (Stark & Noack, 2017). Here, they learn from an early age to behave in a gender-typical way to avoid negative consequences and sanctions while being simultaneously entangled in the production of differences (ibid.). In everyday life, gender relations and the hierarchies and inequalities attached to them are learned, internalized, and (re)produced. To grasp these normative attributions and the manifold processes of upgrading and downgrading

as well as the inclusion and exclusion of people requires focusing on the social contexts of domination in their historical development as well as their concrete effects. Critical Psychology pursues this claim to help understand how people move within the contradictions of a capitalist society (Markard, 2010). Referring to Marx (1960), Critical Psychology assumes that people (re-)produce their living conditions and thus society itself while also being subjected to them. Domination is a reciprocal relationship of practice that must always be renewed and is in a constant state of becoming (Merkens, 2006). A critical psychological perspective examines how to comprehend subjectivity in this interplay. Holzkamp, who founded Critical Psychology, re-centered subjectivity in psychological theorizing and research,

and developed the idea that we need to analyze psychological processes and contents in the conduct of one's own life. Accordingly, one's life is lived in concrete societies and individuals have locations and positions in this society, from which they act and engage their agency (Teo, 2019, p. 112).

Our formulation of the subject-scientific approach was based on Critical Psychology assumptions that make the *sociality of one's own actions* and their entanglements with prevailing power relations the object of common research processes (Osterkamp, 2008).

These epistemological considerations shaped a joint research project done with my colleague Theresa Zimmermann that investigated how young people perceive gender relations and how they move within them. We researched with youth at an Austrian high school to uncover what role the social category of gender plays in their everyday lives, what constraints they face, and where they reflect on these gender roles. We discussed about what they wanted to change both in school and beyond, and where they questioned or pushed the boundaries of existing gender norms.

We define gender as a social category that is produced discursively and praxeologically and is (re-)produced situationally in every interaction (Riegel, 2010; West & Zimmermann, 1987). Gender is a powerful social category that divides people into the binary, two-gender system every day, but also causes people to classify and subordinate themselves. The social category of sexuality is also defined binarily. For example, Butler (1991) shows how discursive strategies and psychological processes help to discard homosexuality and implement heterosexuality as a norm. Furthermore, gender is understood as interwoven with other social categories, such as race, class, dis/ability, or age (Riegel, 2010; Crenshaw, 1991). Drawing on Riegel (2010), these social categories should be emphasized as being structural categories in which asymmetrical classifications and structurings of society take place. This process results in the (unequal) distribution of life prerequisites and social resources. At the same time, this process leads to social constructions through which hegemonic orders of difference are always discursively and praxeologically produced and unequally evaluated (ibid., p. 68).

However, the emergence of heteronormative gender relations as well as other orders of inequality such as class relations as well as racist and postcolonial

orders in globalized capitalist societies have developed and changed historically, and thus are contingent and relational, which requires analyzing them historically and concretely in each case (Haug, 2018). Subject-scientific research aims to contribute to approaching the mediation between structure and agency, or between objective determinacy and subjective determination, and to involve co-researchers in working out these entanglements (Holzkamp, 1983). Participative research approaches start from the co-researchers' everyday experiences, which become the object of joint research (von Unger, 2014). Why the term "participative"? In her article on (feminist) participatory action research, Prasad (2020) distinguishes between *participative* and *participatory* research. Participative research enables participation in certain research phases, whereas participatory research fundamentally envisions participation as a core element at all stages of the research process (Prasad, 2020, p. 19f.). In the following, I refer to this definition and describe participative research to demonstrate the effort involved when trying to enable participation in certain phases of the research process.

My colleague and I designed our research project with this understanding about participation as well as subject-scientific considerations in mind and tried to adapt these theoretical and methodological ideas for our project. The extent to which we succeeded in doing this – or can succeed at all – is the object of this paper. Thus, instead of concluding with detailed results, we ask if a research project can indeed be successfully conducted when it involves a subject-scientific and participative claim and what contradictions arise in the process. By reconstructing my own experiences in attempting to conduct subject-scientific and participatory research, I use the project to reflect upon the opportunities and challenges of such an approach to research and explore the possibilities of combining these two approaches. Our research (Märker, 2018; Zimmermann, 2017) serves as an empirical reference that I look back at self-reflectively for this article.¹ To better understand these reflections, I will (1) clarify the basic assumptions of Critical Psychology as a subject-scientific approach (2) as well as participative research strategies (3) before describing the research process. (4) Using selected results, I will discuss the opportunities, challenges, and dilemmas of such an attempt. These two approaches, including their premises and claims, function as *lenses* that help view the research results and the research process through a renewed reflection. (5) Further, I will examine the school as a research site with a particular focus on its restrictive conditions, which strongly influenced the project. Research that critically reflects upon power relations requires ongoing self-reflection, which must take place at all phases of the research process and also becomes relevant in the writing process (Rühlmann, 2021). (6) Hence, my paper will critically discuss my own situatedness and actions as a researcher. Doing so also bring considerations of alternative modes of research into focus for discussion. Therefore, this effort follows a subject-scientific approach that understands the research process as an opportunity for education

¹ When I write about research phases or reflections that my colleague Theresa Zimmermann and I conducted together or which were conducted collaboratively with the co-researchers, I write of *we*; reflections that were not part of the joint work are written in the first-person singular.

and reflection and thus intends to stimulate the transformation of previous modes of action (Riegel, 2016b).

2. Subject-scientific approach as critical methodology

Agency is a central category of Critical Psychology, and it forms a bracket between the individual and the social as well as between the personal and the political; immediate experiences are simultaneously individual and social (Brensell, 2014, p. 147). The concept of agency conceptually highlights the relationship between the opportunities and constraints of action under capitalist relations and addresses how these are mediated through relations of power and domination (Held, 2015). Here, the focus is always on the double possibility of adaptation and transgression, as comprehended through the terms *restrictive* and *generalized agency* (Markard, 2010). These terms do not describe individual characteristics or seek to classify actions, but rather function as categories of analysis for contradictory social situations (Kaindl, 2017). A central Critical Psychology question is why it can be subjectively functional for individuals to waive the expansion of agency in a restrictive arrangement and instead accept these restrictive circumstances. Answering this requires breaking down how and why those concerned do not perceive opportunities for action and which risks they shy away from (Markard, 2015, p. 51).

By contrast, the category of *generalized agency* captures the ability to gain disposition over relevant life conditions in association with others (Holzkamp, 1985). This term fulfills the function of a utopian corrective and is essential for critical-psychological thinking to maintain an emancipatory perspective (Kaindl, 2017). The focus, then, is on where an expansion of agency can be achieved and alternatives for action can be discovered, but also where it is renounced, and why (Markard, 2015; Holzkamp, 1983). Likewise, the expansion of agency is not a contradiction-free process, because:

it cannot be realized smoothly and easily, but always contains a situation of conflict, in that on the one hand there is the subjective necessity of expanding the quality of my life by expanding the disposition over the conditions of life, but on the other hand I also run the risk of coming into conflict with the ruling authorities at all levels (Holzkamp, 1985, p. 4; translated by author).

However, we are never confronted with society as a whole, but only mediated through various social levels (Markard, 2009). In Critical Psychology these social levels are named *conditions*, *meanings* and *premises*:

[...] [C]onditions mean the objective-economic circumstances of life, meanings refer to the extent to which these conditions contain possibilities and restrictions to action, while premises finally mean those aspects of meaning that each individual accentuates for himself or herself out of their respective reasons and interests. (Markard, 2015, p. 50; translated by author).

However, this level of distinction is, importantly, an analytical one, because these social levels empirically influence and condition each other (Riegel, 2010). As Riegel (2010, p. 72) states, we are dealing with a dialectical and dynamic relationship between structure, social practices or representations, and subject, while the intersectional interaction of relations of difference and dominance are effective at each of those levels. When discussing subjective *reasons* for or against an action, the person must not necessarily be aware of them; 'reasoned' is understood within Critical Psychology as an opposite term to 'conditioned' (Held, 2015; Markard, 2009). Individuals reason their actions as being in the socially mediated meanings and are not determined by them (Markard, 2009). Thus, individual action can only be understood if social conditions, as experienced by the individual, are taken into account, i.e. how the world is interpreted from the respective social situation and intersectional position of a person (Riegel, 2010; Markard, 2009). Thus, in summary, a social theoretical analysis of life circumstances is necessary as "their concrete psychological meaning has to be proven *from the standpoint of the subject*." (Markard, 2009, p. 151; translated by author). This means that subject-scientific research depends on the co-research of all those involved: The co-researchers are those who can intervene in their life circumstances and thus also reflect and elaborate upon the social possibilities and limitations for action that emerge, as well as their meanings in the co-researchers' everyday lives (Markard, 2015). The co-researcher principle implies that the people involved in the research process are seeking an intersubjective relationship (Markard, 2015). This led us to participative research strategies, which also formulate a co-researcher principle, but—unlike to Critical Psychology—have formulated more concrete research methods.

3. Participative research and the photovoice method

Not research *about* people, nor *for* people, but research *with* people – this is the claim and the fundamental epistemological position of participatory research. (Bergold & Thomas, 2010, p. 333; translated by author).

Participatory research aims to ensure the participation of non-scientists across the different levels of a research project. It is vital to enter into a conversation with the co-researchers about their life practices to make explicit what practice has long known implicitly and practically, to free it from irrational reductions, and to lift it in a systematic conceptualization (Bergold & Thomas, 2010). Thus, it is a matter of approaching everyday experiences reflexively to gain distance and to reach a generalization of the respective everyday experiences through exchange with others (Fine & Torre, 2021). Recognizing that other people feel similarly about an overlap in experiences can be a great starting insight (Mies, 1978). Participative research, like Critical Psychology, also formulates the goal of analyzing and changing life-worlds while focusing on lived experiences. Following post- and decolonial critiques, participative research strives to question hegemonic orders of knowledge production when informed by critical

theories and therefore questions who is doing the research, who is speaking and who is legitimized to speak, and whose perspectives are heard or not (Fine & Torre, 2021; Spivak, 1988). Co-researchers' resources and expertise, as well as their experiences of oppression and discrimination, form the starting point for such research (von Unger, 2022; Brensell & Lutz-Kluge, 2020). By conceptually incorporating *participatory contact zones* (Fine & Torre, 2019; Torre, 2009), this research strategy aims to bring individuals from different positionings together to begin a process of joint knowledge production. Hence, research is understood as a practice that is always conducted from a particular socially and physically situated perspective (von Unger, 2022; Haraway, 1988).

My colleague and I chose Wang and Burris' (1997) photovoice method, which is a participative method that combines photographic visual documentation with narratives in a reflexive group process (von Unger, 2014). The project's co-researchers took photos of their living environments, which the group then analyzed to initiate changes (ibid.).

4. The research process

The research project was implemented in collaboration with a fourth-grade class² of Austrian high school students, where we received permission to work with the students in several school periods. The project, translated as "Research on gender roles and gender diversity" started in March 2017 and ended in mid-July 2017, as limited by the strict school curriculum. Our primary research question was on how youth perceive gender roles, but also if and where they push existing boundaries and question dominant gender norms. Approximately 25 students participated in the study, although the number varied at times because of sick leaves and other absences. The first units of the photovoice project concerned planning the research and training the co-researchers to use the cameras (von Unger, 2014). This included collaboratively working out what research can mean, what our joint project could look like in concrete terms and discussing ethical guidelines for taking photographs. During the second unit, we played a game to initiate a critical reflection on gender relations. This led to the photo assignment where the co-researchers were given disposable cameras. Disposable cameras were chosen for the photovoice project because their photos cannot be edited, shared, or deleted in any way. This would ideally counteract and social pressure among the youth and prevent the assignment from becoming a competition for the most beautiful photo. Many students were unfamiliar with this type of camera, which increased their interest. By taking photos, the youth could capture their own perspectives and engage in an exploration of gender and gender relations in their everyday life. After this longer field phase, we collected the cameras were collected and had the photos developed. The co-researchers were then tasked with selecting one or two photos to speak about in the group discussions that followed. While we emphasized that the task of selecting photos

² This is a typical way of counting school levels in Austria; the students were between 13 and 14 years old.

was voluntary, we were also aware that tasks are usually perceived as mandatory – especially within a school context. We selected dominant topics and questions from the group discussions, further explored in plenary discussion. The final session took place at the university, where we ran a research workshop to plan a photo exhibition with the co-researchers a few days later. During the workshop, the youth gave the photos titles and we worked together to cluster the photos thematically and conceptualize the exhibition path. Furthermore, different working groups were responsible for planning steps like setting up a musical playlist, crafting decoration, and writing an opening speech for the exhibition.

Outside of the participative research phase, my colleague and I conducted two interviews with class teachers and the school principal, and another interview with a gender mainstreaming expert. Through these interviews we wanted to learn more about if and how gender-reflective teaching is handled in everyday school life, while considering teachers' perspectives.

5. Opportunities and challenges in attempting to conduct research with a subject-scientific and participative claim

Research with a subject-scientific and participative claim is demanding; it requires openness and flexibility, which can conflict with institutional restrictions, research logics as well as the researchers' admittedly normative attitudes and perceptions. The following reflects upon the possibilities and challenges that arose in the research process and discusses how concepts and the terms, especially from Critical psychology, helped us navigate and think through difficult project situations.

5.1 Terms and concepts for social (self-)understanding

Gender relations are properly understood through the Critical-Psychological concepts of *restrictive* and *generalized agency*. For example, settling with the existing gender order can be seen as an attempt to maintain one's own agency under restrictive conditions. Thus, personal needs and interests may require suppression while youth are growing up in order to 'fit' into this binary order (Kalkstein, 2016). "Gender, in the sense of the heterosexual matrix, is always a restriction of action and experience, as well as a restrictive attempt to gain agency: It excludes a significant part of sexual practices [...], access to certain feelings, lifestyles" (ibid., p. 132, translated by author), along with ways of relating and loving, and gender identities. Acting towards *generalized agency* could mean collectively working against the existing gender order. However, advocating for spaces where existing norms can be challenged can also mean an expansion of agency. This process is not contradiction-free, since transgressing the existing hegemonic binary order may cause the subject to encounter hetero and cis sexism, exclusion, and even violence (Meissner, 2008). Thus, remaining in a restrictive arrangement, behaving in a gender-conforming manner, and

(re)producing these often seems subjectively functional. This is where our research began in order to explore spaces of possibility with the students. We asked where they perceived societal structures and norms and simultaneously encouraged them to reflect on how they already questioned the existing order. Agency as an analytical category, as well as its intersectional differentiation (see Riegel 2016a/2010), helped us recognize everyday categorizations, boundaries, and constructions of difference more quickly in the respective interactions with the co-researchers. Our intention was to make them the object of research in the form of our own self-reflection, but also to use these observations as the basis for discussions with the co-researching youth. This form of dialogical analysis can help co-researchers as well as academic researchers to gain a deeper understanding of their entanglements, experiences, and limitations in the existing inequalities and to grasp structural problems (Brensell & Lutz-Kluge, 2020; Fine & Torre, 2019). Naming collective experiences enables the beginning of a process of recognition, which is the condition for changes in actions. For us as academic researchers, the concepts of Critical Psychology were central to reflect upon our own thinking and acting in the process itself, as they helped us break down concrete situations in their contradictions and embeddedness in existing power relations.

5.2 Stages of participation and acquiring new possibilities of thinking

The degree of co-researcher participation varied in different stages of the project. When discussing the questions, there were fewer opportunities for co-determination, since ensuring the approval of our research project required us to formulate the questions in advance.³ However, we made sure to formulate them as openly as possible. In the units leading up to the research workshop, the co-researchers' decision-making power mainly concerned content. By contrast, we set the thematic framework within which the youth provided the focal points and could decide how much they wanted to be involved. The research workshop is an example of the realization of participation where the young people could plan the exhibition in a self-determined manner. Opening a space for intersubjective understanding processes of social attributions and the effects of these in everyday practices with the youth sometimes revealed personal entanglements in structures of inequality. Thus, the young people referred to stereotypical images and ideas of how boys and girls 'should be.' At the same time, they also reproduced many binary and biologicistic gender ascriptions. The narratives showed what kind of adjustments go together with assignments and classifications concerning gender markers of difference. Likewise, the narratives demonstrated forms of inclusions and exclusions that result from hegemonically incorrect gender representations in

³ As part of the project's approval, we were required to explain and provide the research questions, the theoretical background as well as the methodological framework. Additionally, we had to submit grant applications to the University of Klagenfurt/ Celovec to receive research funding. These procedures were anything but participative and represented institutional logics and regulations that made us (as academic researchers) determine key research steps before we could even initiate our collaboration with the students.

their everyday lives. These stories also articulated resistance against normative gender ascriptions and described moments of rebellion; for example, when students resisted being told from other peers or adults that boys and girls can't be best friends or that feelings are classified and gendered. These processes of questioning and contradictions were moments we incorporated into the later units. The photos, captions, and co-researchers' self-written speech also allowed for a visual record; in some cases, these revealed how new patterns of thought and interpretation were acquired while dealing with everyday attributions. One co-researcher titled her photo, displaying a pink and a blue sock, "*The pink and the blue sock are supposed to represent which clichés the two sexes often (have to) follow.*" This photo led to narratives of experiences of discrimination that several students encountered when they failed to comply with hegemonic gender norms. Yet, narratives also thematized the co-researchers' own involvement in the reproduction of gender ascriptions as well as the devaluation of others through swear words. Another photo showed bathroom urinals, which led to an examination of gender-segregated spaces and places at school and was thus assigned to the 'typical girl and typical boy' exhibition. Another photo, which depicted two pairs of legs in jeans and sneakers, was titled "*Puzzle picture: Which gender do the respective legs have?*" The image stimulated a discussion about the pressure to dress in a gender-conforming way and the forms of interaction that are practiced daily. The young people also referred to historical developments and changes in gender roles, which points recognizing social conditions and working towards their de-naturalization. It was clear from the majority of the youths' contributions that they perceive a liquefaction of existing gender orders especially through clothing. On the one hand, they also cited limited flexibility since their actions were sometimes met with rejection from parents, teachers or peer groups. On the other hand, the school setting and the groups of friends formed there also seemed to provide spaces of experience where the co-researchers could experiment with their clothing and their gender expression.

Nevertheless, as existing studies have shown, this project revealed the robustness of the heteronormative gender binary and its associated attributions as well as how they function as a deep layer knowledge of everyday life (Gildemeister, 2010; West & Zimmermann, 1987). Projects making a subject-scientific and participative claim can only *try* to open up a space to make one's own embeddedness in existing power relations the object of joint reflections. The photographs and joint group discussions allowed for combining perspectives and bringing them into an exchange to facilitate potential, deeper understandings.

5.3 Photographically tracing contradictions and initiating negotiation processes

Wang and Burris' (1997) photovoice method can empower people to capture and reflect on the problems and strengths within a community. Furthermore, it can

help initiate critical dialogue and a process of gaining knowledge about key community characteristics through discussing the photographs.

As a participative method, to what extent could the photovoice method contribute to analyzing the young people's lifeworld and to addressing contexts and problems more concretely? Using the youth's self-selected photos facilitated an entry into discussions by using this third object to trigger reflections and subsequent questions that arise. Importantly, the discussion was not facilitated by the photo alone, but by a conversation 'about it' with the makers and about 'their' reasons and meanings behind it. Thus, the central issue is therefore the extent to which the young people's life-world can be experienced through the camera lens. The method proved useful to our project with the young people because it represented a low-threshold approach since most young people are familiar with taking photographs. Likewise, it enabled the co-researchers to initially record their very individual perspective without being bound by language. Taking photos enabled them to primarily focus on the social practices that produce gender as a category of social distinction, as well as where these are questioned. The subsequent group and plenary discussions allowed for a more in-depth examination of these everyday interpersonal attributions and experiences. It was precisely the photos depicting people, objects, or behaviors that did not correspond to the hegemonic binary logic that triggered the most group discussions. Given that what is *supposedly self-evident is robbed of its self-evidence* (Degele, 2008, p. 93), this explains why such photos can therefore lead to a different discussion. Freire (2005), who has made important contributions to participative and participatory research literature, suggests that processes of consciousness arise when people meet as dialogue partners. This occurs because they are "simultaneously reflecting on themselves and on the world, increase the scope of their perception, they begin to direct their observations towards previously inconspicuous phenomena" (ibid., p. 82). In that regard, the socio-critical claim of subject-scientific and participative research is also characterized by its goal to acquire new potential ways to think and act through the insights gained from the joint analysis. However, participants' project findings were certainly not uniform. Nonetheless, the participative and subject-scientific approach allows for moments of co-production where everyone can learn something new (Arztmann et al., 2017). Taking young people's issues seriously promoted processes of negotiation that allowed for resistance or dissent. Participative and subject-scientific approaches are precisely characterized by their tendency to support taking up and repeatedly discussing important topics. The project's concluding exhibition at the university further disseminated the results to a wider public, thus providing external visibility. For at least some of the students, the photo exhibition and preparatory research workshop – which some students were proud of – was encouraging. However, we continued later steps of the analysis without the co-researchers due to time, resource and structural limitations. Presenting the results as a photo exhibition concluded our collaboration with the youth, while my colleague and I continued to work with the data and results and added some new questions. However, strict university guidelines had a great influence on the project and limited it.

5.4 Research logics and settings as en/disabling participative processes.

Research is determined by a logic that is presuppositional and imbued with power, requiring constant reflection (Arztmann et al., 2017). Participative and subject-scientific research risks constructing co-researchers as entirely able and willing to research, although they may have different individual interests about their participation. Likewise, their motivations may vary and include an interest in the topic, a sense of duty, or avoiding regular school lessons. Our motivation was mainly determined by our curiosity about working with youth on about gender relations. Despite diverging motives, a space emerged during the project that provided the foundation for joint researching, learning and working.

The observed processes of *doing differences* in youth's everyday life and society demonstrated that young people are clearly aware of these processes (West & Fenstermaker, 1995). Nevertheless, they rarely directly relate their experiences to social structures of power and domination. However, how should they do so, if in school there is little discussion with young people about the various inequalities. Schools are usually unable to address these issues sufficiently because they themselves are anchored in social relations and are as Foucault (1977) says, *institutions of discipline*. Like other disciplinary institutions, the school is a place where mechanisms "of comparing, differentiating hierarchizing, homogenizing, and excluding become effective as so-called disciplinary techniques." (Riegel, 2016a, p. 32, translated by author). The relationship between those who teach and those who must learn illustrates the hierarchical and asymmetrical nature of school relationships, which is where participative and subject-scientific research strategies can question existing boundaries by breaking up the traditional schooling logic:

Working with children and adolescents in school means [...] addressing them as knowers or as knowledge producers in a place where they are otherwise integrated as 'learners' and where - depending on the basic pedagogical stance of the school and the teachers - less(er) knowledge and autonomy is attributed to them. (Wöhrer, 2017, p. 44; translated by author).

The participative and subject-scientific approaches allow for thinking about hierarchies and addressing entanglements, which certainly contributed to discrimination by teachers being raised as a topic in almost all groups. This was further discussed during the plenary session in terms of how 'good teacher' should be and what needs to change within the school. These discussions resulted in a list of points and demands, which my colleague and I passed on to the school principal at the co-researchers' request.

The school system and its accompanied structural limitations enabled and disabled certain research relationships, which were relevant for collaborating in the field. We quickly realized that the school as a *space of norming* (Mecheril & Shure, 2018) also had a structuring influence on this project, which is why I will expand on relevant experiences in this regard.

5.4.1 School as a research field

Researching with young people in school is a challenging process. Schools have their very own constitution, which is not conceived from the students' point of view (Wöhrer et al., 2017). Schools comprise a specific form of organization that is determined by a fixed set of rules with clear courses of action, structures, and conditions. In turn, these rules have an impact on students and teachers, although as different socialization experiences (Feichter, 2015). Although we had to adapt to the school logic as researchers, because we lacked a teacher role, we had other opportunities for action during the project. Since we had different goals than teachers when working with the youth, our role as researchers helped us escape certain school-specific communication patterns and rules. However, we still had a duty of supervision, which gave rise to new contradictions as well described by Arztmann et al. (2016):

Yet, researchers do also have pedagogical as well as ethical demands in the situation. Moreover, they have the legal responsibility to watch over minors. These requirements may conflict with their role as observers and facilitators of open modes of exploration. (p. 89).

Throughout the project, we noticed how both the demands placed on us by the school and role expectations conflicted with our intentions. We had the impression that we were strongly perceived as teachers by some of the youth; for example, some of the co-researchers searched to make eye contact with us during their spoken contributions to confirm their contributions were appropriate. Typical school experiences of being corrected and censored were clearly visible in such situations. Additionally, the collaboration was influenced by the fact that my colleague and I entered the students' environment from an external context and left after the project ended, while they were required to attend school. Thus, the school setting significantly influenced the project's aspect of voluntariness. Although student participation was not necessarily compulsory, it was neither entirely voluntary because students who opted out of the project would have remained with the class teacher. The entire class was also asked prior to the research if they wished to participate in the research project at all⁴. However, we were not given detailed information of the class voting procedure and therefore do not know if it was, e.g., a majority or consensus decision or how the teacher designed the project announcement.

Student participation in school development or change opens up areas of tension (Arztmann et al., 2017). The limitations we faced became quickly apparent because the role of students in the school systems does not involve changing something in the structures (ibid.). The hierarchical structures, rigid school logic, and its behavioral norms contained also influenced the form of knowledge production within the project; for example, we were pre-structured by the school time frame. The co-researchers seem to expect a lot of input from us, especially at the beginning of the research project, which could be linked to the

⁴ Previously, another class was asked, and refused to participate in the project.

clear scheduling and familiar school hours. Additionally, the physical space proved highly relevant for the type of communication and the atmosphere: The first units took place in the classroom, whereas the group and plenary discussions were held in at the school in other rooms,⁵ and the research workshop was outside the physical school building—at the university. The act of physically stepping out of the familiar school premises seemed to make it easier for the young people to engage in the research process.

We subsequently reflected on whether research projects with a participative and subject-scientific claim are even possible within the school framework, or whether seeking out-of-school settings would be more conducive to collaborative research projects with children and adolescents, since they allow for more creative freedom. Again, the analytic category of agency helped us think through our positionings in the research setting and about alternative ways of acting. For future projects, it would also be interesting to focus on interpellation practices that take place in the research process and empirically reconstruct how an academic researcher is referred to and seen by the field and the respective actors and *vice versa*. Our analysis is informative because it allows us to trace the rules and routines in the respective field as well as the power relations inscribed in them more closely from an intersectional perspective (Siouti, 2022; Riegel, 2016a). These reconstructions could then help derive modified modes of action for further research (steps).

5.4.2 Involved research and moments of failure

We are involved in *doing gender* on a daily basis and thus also in the research process (West & Zimmermann, 1987). Therefore, we are always, simultaneously both recognizers and recognized (Schigl, 2012). Constantly reflecting on my own biographical knowledge bases and privileges as a *white* cis woman,⁶ who studied psychology, as well as all other lines of difference, was and is a challenging task. Being embedded in existing power relations and binary patterns of thought and role, it was crucial to exchange ideas with my colleague and other peers. It was precisely because of our research question, with its strong focus on gender relations, that we could quickly neglect other relations of inequality or become entangled in othering processes ourselves. We also saw how we were confronted by reifications as an urgent matter, since we reproduced binary categories ourselves to make power relations speakable while claiming to adopt a deconstructivist stance. This is a contradiction that could not and cannot be resolved, but nevertheless demands constantly trying to work through these

⁵ The other rooms were the library and a music room.

⁶ Cis or cisgender means that I identify with the gender that was assigned to me at birth. This designation does not imply that cis persons are 'normal.' Rather, prior to the term 'cisgender' being introduced, only transgender people were exclusively named, which contributed to othering (Ewert, 2021, p. 21). The designation *white* does not refer to actual skin color but is about a very privileged social position in the hierarchical, racist order (Kurt, 2021). *white* is written in lower case and italics to mark its socially constructed character.

dilemmas⁷. With regard to my own stance, I had to remind myself of our aims and practice constant critical sensitization and vigilance. For example, during some of the co-researchers' narratives of discrimination they experienced, I felt a sense of wanting to protect and shield them from normative violence, but in doing so I homogenized them as victims and adopted a paternalistic perspective. In addition, the question of normativity arose often, because we felt the need to intervene when derogatory and/or discriminatory statements were made by other students. We experienced unease when binary conceptions of gender were reproduced and felt an urge to co-construct emancipatory results. These are problematic conceptions and should be the object of constant reflection processes since they contradict the principle of openness in qualitative research. Addressing these observations with my colleague allowed us to reflect on them together and refocus the project goals of the project, to proceed in a subject-scientific and participative way. I therefore find it very important, especially for participative and subject-scientific projects, to work in a team that consists of more than one academic researcher, thriving on cooperation and solidarity among each other.

Relationships are vital throughout the research process; they are shaped to different degrees and in different ways by both insider and outsider positionings. While intersectional positionalities are relational (Siouti, 2022) and stem from complex situational negotiations, shared experiences or similar imprints through socialization and education can nevertheless have a fundamentally positive influence on research and understanding processes (von Unger, 2022, p. 95), as expressed by von Unger: "Conversely, social distance and unequal power relations in research relationships can foster othering processes" (ibid.; translated by author). Fine (1994) uses a *hyphen* metaphor to reflect on the 'in-between', i.e. the manifold ways of relating in the field, and especially what connects and separates us:

By *working the hyphen*, I mean to suggest that researchers probe how we are in relation with the contexts we study and with our informants, understanding that we are all multiple in those relations. I mean to invite researchers to see how these 'relations between' get us 'better' data, limit what we feel free to say, expand our minds and constrict our mouths, engage us in intimacy and seduce us into complicity, make us quick to interpret and hesitant to write. Working the hyphen means creating occasions for researchers and informants to discuss what is and is not 'happening between' within the negotiated relations of whose story is being told, why, to whom, with what interpretation, and whose story is being shadowed, why, for whom and with what consequence. (ibid., p. 72).

Drawing on Fine's considerations, von Unger (2022) concludes that for research processes, this means reflecting on the posed questions and entanglements in

⁷ Mohseni, Merl & Mai (2018) refer to these difficulties in the following excerpt: "Binary categories such as woman/man or sick/healthy only offer the possibility of naming and making visible relations of domination. Without such naming and making visible in the binary categories, political resistance would not be possible.

At the same time, working with the analytical tool on relations of difference such as 'deprived' and 'privileged' inevitably runs the risk of reproducing binary category thinking and essentializing social constructions and collective identities." (p. 27f.; translated by author).

field notes, memos, in conversations with peers, and in research workshops. It is not only epistemologically relevant to reflect upon situatedness and positionality, but also from a research ethics point of view (von Unger, 2022). This is especially due to the fast-moving nature of moments and the strong involvement of academic researchers, which causes a much stronger compulsion to act in participative settings than in more distanced qualitative research designs. This compulsion quickly leads to the reproduction of discrimination, even if unintended (see chapter by Schneider, 2017). Thus, as Guillemin and Gillam (2004) proposed, I call for an *ethically vigilant stance*, which means taking responsibility for the research process, especially for faulty situations, looking at them self-critically, and writing about them. Keeping a research diary and collegial exchange helped us gain distance from the field and self-critically reflect upon our experiences, descriptions, and mistakes with a time lag. Following Fine, von Unger (2022) aspires for research to importantly include all co-researchers and researchers in these processes of joint reflection. The basic assumption of subject-scientific research is that people do not act against their own interests: Social self-understanding means that we all depend on each other to be able to recognize the limitedness and restrictiveness of our own ways of seeing and acting in the world (Osterkamp, 2008). In participative and subject-scientific research, trying to create spaces for joint reflexive meta-discussions about the research process itself would be desirably rather than only about the object of the research. Our project especially lacked the time and resources to engage in this in-depth work⁸.

Participative and subject-scientific research project is very demanding, and we could meet all such demands. In retrospect, this led feelings of a guilty conscience, disappointment, and shame. I felt that I had failed to meet my own standards as well as the principles of participative and subject-scientific research. However, in Wöhrer et al.'s (2017) *Participatory Action Research with Children and Adolescents* – especially Karin Schneider's commentary – helped me to better classify these emotions and also recognize them as a productive moment for learning about the tensions in such research processes:

This guilty conscience effect happens when I start with a claim and fail to meet it. Namely, the claim of shared and equal knowledge production in a different research paradigm that leads to change processes in which the development of the research question and the presentation of the research results is egalitarian. If we feel an emotion like 'guilty conscience,' this could also refer to a tension between these egalitarian and political claims we make about PAR [Participatory Action Research] and the reality of falling back into classical research stances. (Arztmann et al., 2017, p. 24; translated by author).

It was not realistic to do justice to the claim of participative and subject-scientific

⁸ Participatory and participative research is much more time intensive compared to more 'conventional' projects (Schwenken, 2019). Referring to colleagues at the National Domestic Worker Alliance who conducted a participatory project, Schwenken recommends doubling the estimated time required for all research steps. This is a significant hurdle for participatory and participative projects within the scope of project funding logics and the neoliberalization of the university.

research, especially in a restrictive school setting and given the project's time-restricted framework. Hence, we can instead discuss certain participative moments and phases during the research project. Additionally, it raises the question, what damage can result from this form of participative interference? We were no longer in the class after the project ended and thus cannot say anything about initiated negotiation processes. However, it was and is precisely the research ethics dilemmas that were and still are of increased urgency in this type of research or become visible through the approaches. These questions and challenges continued to preoccupy my thoughts long beyond the project context, raising the further question of how this form of research is possible and what it needs to really meet the claims of these research strategies.

6. Provisional conclusion

Despite the interconnectedness of research in existing inequality relations and previously addressed problems, subject-scientific and participative projects can have critical potential if they are based on the everyday practices of the co-researchers. Together, the co-researchers and researchers attempted to unravel the problems and reasons behind encountered contradictions and experiences and explore new opportunities for action through processes of intersubjective understanding. Opening a space to address gender relations and deal with discriminatory experiences could lead to new experiences, and possibly to the development of new spaces for thinking and acting (Meretz, 2017). Even if the respective social conditions impose certain role patterns and hegemonic norms on every individual in daily practices, there is nevertheless always the possibility to transcend the in- and excluding patterns of thought and shift or change one's modes of action to contribute to changing social conditions (Riegel, 2016a, p. 311). The co-researchers also addressed these opportunities for action in their self-authored speech at the exhibition opening:

It's a shame that not everyone is treated and given equal rights regardless of their gender. With our project, we probably can't completely eradicate this injustice, but we can make others aware of this problem. Each individual can have a say in whether discrimination should play a role in their world. (Märker, 2018, p. 131; translated by author)

Subject-scientific and participative research approaches can be combined well, since these approaches are characterized by a partisan and value-based stance that strives for the equal participation of all those involved in the research process – recognizing that this undertaking is impossible in relations of inequality (von Unger, 2022/2014). However, this raises the question of what understanding of society this stance is based on and what underlining conception of agency exists. These considerations are vital to research understanding itself as an instrument "by means of which subjective experiences can be made visible in their mediating context with social contradictions" (Brensell & Lutz-Kluge, 2020, p. 9; translated by author) and that focuses on opening up new modes of

action under local conditions. To avoid instrumentalizing participative research or even stabilizing prevailing relations of violence, a more concrete understanding of the interaction of structure and agency is necessary, which sets the stage for the critique. Critical psychology, including its categorical determinations and its intersectional reformulations and additions (see Riegel et al., 2018; Riegel, 2016b/2010), offers a central starting point that is fruitful to combine with participative research. These approaches can shift the gaze to take people's practices, experiences, and their willful ways of acting as a catalyst for research without neglecting existing relations of inequality (Ahmed, 2014). Making these different modes of action and the associated desired expansion of agency a research focus can enable socio-critical research from the subject's standpoint while acknowledging that "our work will never 'arrive' but must always struggle 'between'" (Fine, 1994, p. 74) between the multiple relationships and entanglements in existing power relations.

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"Money lets you sleep more peacefully, that's what I've experienced": Negotiations between motherhood and working-life from a class-sensitive perspective

Fiona Kalkstein

Abstract

Since the early 2000s, numerous family policy interventions have aimed at improving the reconciliation of work and family life in Germany. However, low-income women often face particular challenges in this regard, which the new measures hardly seem to take into account. This study therefore explores the question of what subjective and objective possibilities these women see for combining work and motherhood. It is based on biographical, guideline-supported interviews with six women from workers' milieus of different generations. The theoretical and methodological framework of the study is formed by critical psychology in Holzkamp's sense, and the interviews were evaluated with the developmental figure of critical psychology. The results show that the six women interviewed find ways and means to deal with the contradictory demands on them as mothers and class subjects, which can hardly be met in their entirety. The focus is on the negotiations along the following aspects, which proved to be central in the evaluation of the interviews: The relationship to (bourgeois) norms of the "good mother"; the mental relationship to the sociality of one's own problem situation; the awareness of the unstable preconditions of the (modernized) breadwinner model; and the care and maintenance of one's own social relationships (outside the partnership). These aspects are highlighted and discussed in relation to the current research situation.

Keywords

class, family policy, Germany, motherhood, women, work-life

1. Reconciliation or (in)reconciliation - a matter of class?

In the past thirty years, reconciliation of family- and work-life has become a societal goal and a "central policy field" (Auth, 2010, p.7) of German family

policy. This development is discussed in close connection with the increased labor force participation of women¹, which has almost doubled in Germany since 1970. Women have become an important, if not the most important, component of new labor market policies, not only wanting to work but also being expected to do so. Since women have also been considered "achievers" (McRobbie, 2010, p. 114) "who can make it in this society" (ibid.), measures to reconcile family- and work-life have increasingly become the focus of family and equality policies. Thus, since the early 1990s, numerous measures have been introduced to make it easier for mothers to be gainfully employed. The expansion of public childcare for under-threes and all-day care in kindergartens and schools, the right to work part-time while receiving parental benefits, and the introduction of parental allowance as an income-related wage replacement benefit are just a few examples of such measures. All of these are aimed at a modernized, heteronormative model of the family², according to which both parents can and should be gainfully employed (adult-worker model, see Lewis, 2004). Auth et al. (2010, p. 8) argue, with regard to equality policies since the 2000s, "that the family and equality policy reforms in Germany [...] have not meant equal opportunities and more freedom of choice for all women equally. Instead, selective emancipation has taken place, with more equality for socially better-off women." The goal of supporting female academics in particular in having children and taking parental leave through the introduction of parental allowance was also reaffirmed by the German Chancellor³. A turning point in family policy was the introduction of parental allowance in 2007 as an income-related wage replacement benefit, which replaces almost 70 percent of the previous salary. But if this measure was intended to better enable women to remain financially independent during parental leave, this step was also a novelty in that it no longer included any disadvantage compensation for low-earning women. In 2011, parental allowance was finally offset against unemployment benefit II (Arbeitslosengeld II, short: ALG II) to the detriment of mothers who are already on the edge of the subsistence level. While higher-earning women today have more opportunities to combine family and career than in the past (see e.g. Abele, 2003), the influence of changed conditions and a changed discourse on the life reality of proletarian women has not yet been investigated.

¹ In many articles cited in this study, the category "women" is not further defined. I will refer to cis-women in the following when quoting statements about women. The active opening of the labor market to trans women and queer people occurred later and is to be discussed in a different context.

² The ideal of family is to be separated from the definition of family on which this work is based. The societal model of what family is and what almost everyone can agree on is the core family: mother, father and about two children. The more another form of life resembles this composition, the more likely it is to be perceived as a family. The extent to which a constellation can deviate from the ideal nuclear family in order to still be perceived as a family varies socially (Luck/Ruckdeschel, 2015, p. 74f).

³ Until now, support for families has actually always been support for families in need. Now, for the first time, we have taken the initiative to say that no matter how much someone earns, the decision to have a child is, of course, a wonderful private decision, but it is also an important decision for society. That's why we don't want this decision to be associated with too much loss of standard of living. That's why we give a certain percentage of the last salary for one year." (Merkel, 2006)

2. State of research

While for many families⁴ the hegemonic concepts are indeed the model and reality, alternative family practices and designs have always existed. When the norm of the male sole breadwinner was booming in the 1950s and 1960s, many women were simultaneously single parents in the aftermath of World War II (Notz, 2016, p. 102). Women from the working classes were often gainfully employed, as one salary was not enough to live on, and they additionally did the household and child-rearing work (Beer, 2010, p. 60). If today the *adult-worker model* or the ideal of the *working mom* prevails, according to which the mother is supposed to combine gainful employment, family life, financial independence, and self-care without any problems, reconciliation in the sense of having her own salary that is not far below the social average remains the preserve of very few women with children (Barišić/Consiglio, 2020, p. 4f; BMFSFJ, 2016, p. 4). Barišić and Consiglio highlight that mothers continue to earn significantly less income than fathers and then women without children. According to them, the average increase in women's earned income over the past 30 years is almost entirely due to the increased incomes of women *without* children. In particular, the expansion of the low-wage sector and part-time work in the form of mini-jobs is seen as a "risky form of employment" (Klenner/Schmidt, 2012). There is a clear gap between the social ideal and the reality of motherhood. For many women, reconciling family and work life is a problem when it comes to lasting, stable financial independence (OECD, 2017; BMFSFJ, 2016, p. 11). The notion that more and more women are employed as well as (quite relevant!) debates about double burden have displaced those about women's financial dependence. Sick and Schmidt (2015) point out:

While more and more mothers are in the labor force, one might therefore assume that women's household incomes recover over time from the post-divorce trough. But in fact, only marginal employment and part-time work have increased. The volume of work itself has actually declined! (p. 129)

Since 2016, the labor force volume has been back at the 1991 level (Grünheid, 2018, p. 6).

The fact that most mothers are employed part-time is considered the cause of the low income of mothers in Germany. Women state family responsibilities and caring for dependents as the most common reason for part-time work (Wanger, 2015, p. 3). Full-time working women are nevertheless left with the bulk of the reproductive work (Berghammer/Verwiebe, 2015, p. 122). While women of the higher (wage) classes can finance household help and external childcare in this case, those from the working classes are often exposed to the

⁴ The term is based on the family definition of the microcensus: "In the microcensus, the family includes all parent-child relationships, i.e. married couples, non-marital (mixed-sex) and same-sex partnerships, as well as single parents with unmarried children in the household. Included are - in addition to biological children - also stepchildren, foster children and adopted children without age limit. Thus, a family always consists of two generations: Parents/parents and unmarried children living in the household." (Statistisches Bundesamt, Glossary: Family)

double burden of gainful employment and family work. If they opt for a part-time model, their income is barely sufficient to support themselves. Another problem is shift work, which often does not fall within the childcare hours of daycare centers.

Motherhood and the regulating power of norms

In 1921, the socialist women's rights activist Alexandra Kollontai asked, "How can women get rid of the eternal housework that only consumes unnecessary energies? Women could really use these energies more sensibly" (Kollontai, 1977, p. 163). What was meant was not how women could cede housework to other social groups, but how they could free themselves from the situation that they do housework because they are women (and are thus kept from other activities). It is not only social structures that lead to women not being able to get rid of 'the eternal housework', especially when they start a family. Dreßler (2018, p. 11) additionally understands motherhood as a cultural pattern of interpretation that "links female reproductive abilities with caring competencies and an emotionally strong bond between mother and child." Thus, from femininity is derived the natural-biological ability to care for children emotionally and to raise them competently out of an apparently innate maternal instinct. It is by no means to deny that this socially implemented female bonding and caring capacity allows mothers to form strong bonds with children that are sources of positive experiences happiness, joy, and social competence. Nevertheless, gendered norms of parenting undoubtedly have a regulating role. Speck (2016, p. 40) even sees the "primary function" of the ideal of the good mother in the "allocation of familial caring activities [...] to women," thus clearly highlighting its regulative character. In addition, there is the class bias of the symbolic representation of good motherhood, which various authors also point out (e.g., Speck, 2016; Dreßler, 2018). Mothers today are supposed to be financially independent, but *full-time* maternal employment is still considered incompatible with maternal responsibility toward the child (Dreßler, 2018, p. 33; Diabeté, 2015, p. 216). Financial independence on a part-time basis is difficult to achieve for many women, but for mothers from low-wage backgrounds it is sheer impossible. At the same time, women today are suggested that they can work and have careers as mothers, that they can seemingly become politicians and professors with ease – if only they manage their lives in the right way. Following McRobbie (2010), this imposes an interpretive framework with which the "effects of class discrimination, racism, and the sheer persistence of insurmountable obstacles for girls from poor backgrounds" (ibid., p. 110) completely disappear from public consciousness. If mothers fail to meet expectations of society, this can quickly become emblematic of merely individual failures to plan, she argues. Incompatibility is not a new phenomenon, but what role do class privileges and resources play in determining whether a woman manages to combine motherhood satisfactorily with a job and financial independence? If Flöther and Oberkrome (2017, p. 143) are followed, then in Germany "compatibility

problems are discussed especially for university careers, while empirical findings are largely lacking for other professional sectors." Against this background, this paper examines the reconciliation goals and practices of working-class women with a view to their subjective satisfaction with their implementation. Of particular interest is the question of whether desires for financial independence were present and how the possibilities to realize them were perceived. Against the theoretical background of Critical Psychology, the question of the extent to which women actively work to improve the conditions for reconciliation is always relevant.

3. Theoretical framework: Critical Psychology

Research that emerges within the paradigm of Critical Psychology always poses challenges to relatively short writings, such as a journal article. Critical psychology must be understood as a distinct research paradigm that operates with its own theoretical presuppositions, analytic terms, as well as a specifically developed methodological implementation of the paradigm. This sediment of Critical Psychology can only be presented here in a very abbreviated form and reference must be made to more comprehensive writings. In doing so, the study is oriented towards the theoretical-methodological explanations of Critical Psychology by Holzkamp (1985) as well as its further development by Markard (2009) and various feminist further developments (Kalkstein, 2016, Sieben & Kalkstein, 2015, Rommelspacher, 1991). The central lines will be traced.

How a subject behaves in a situation is considered by Critical Psychology as the interplay of individual needs, objective possibilities and constraints, their (normative) representation (e.g., in forms of thinking), and their accentuation and interpretation by the subject itself. In this context, Markard (2009) speaks of the "overall social mediatedness of individual existence" (p. 178). In the present study, the focus is specifically on the tension between the externally imposed conditions under which women must establish compatibility and the exploration of possibilities to overcome obstacles and to shape compatibility according to their own ideas and needs. For proletarian women, a situation exists that is referred to as *structural (in)compatibility* of family and gainful employment, following the explanations in chapter 2. Within the structural framework, the respective chosen forms of action – the *practices of (in)compatibility* – emerge. In critical-psychological terms, they are seen as an interplay of individual *reasons* (desires, needs, biographical experiences), structural possibilities and their subjective accentuation (*premises*). Forms of action can be analyzed as *premise-reason relations*. Actions are grounded in premises and usually aim at expanding the individual's agency. The agency can be expanded *restrictively* (within the structurally given framework) or by struggling to improve the initial situation (generalized agency). *Generalized agency* thereby represents a determination of the direction of practice in order "in the unfolding of the possibilities for cooperative self-determination of our own affairs [to] also arrive at a satisfying, anxiety-free, and fulfilled subjective existence." (Holzkamp,

1984, p. 10) It shows what would be possible and focuses on cooperative self-determination: the disposition of one's own living conditions in interaction with others. Against this background, the analytical notion of double possibility emphasizes that concrete people in principle always have the possibility to intervene in social conditions. As a category of analysis, it systematically incorporates into the inquiry that people have the possibility to engage in the expansion of the disposal of one's own living conditions (*generalized agency*). Analytically, it provides the framework for determining what restrictions on agency people experience in a situation.

In research practice, the focus is on the "subjective way of prereception" (ibid.) these very restrictions. The perceived immutability of existing power and inequality relations is identified as the intellectual premise of restrictive agency (Holzkamp, 1985, p. 370). With regard to the social contradictions between gainful employment and motherhood that the women in question encounter, it is important to understand the functionality of restrictive entanglements through the mental fading out of the *double possibility*. Actions do have reasons, but these reasons (interests, desires, needs) are by no means always conscious (cf. the self-critical discussion by Huck, 2006). Analyzing the conditions and functionality of individually realized forms of thinking thus opens up the possibility of looking at experience in a new way. In the critical-psychological developmental figure (*Entwicklungsfigur*), it is an independent methodological step, which I will discuss in the next chapter.

The relation between subjectively experienced possibilities of action, objectively restricting conditions of life, and double possibility forms the core of a critical-psychological problem-analysis. The typical critical-psychological relation between subjectively experienced and socially given possibilities is brought into analytical focus.

4. Methodical Procedure

Data collection

The study reconstructs the subjective view of women of different generations on their own possibilities of reconciling family and gainful employment. Data basis are seven biographical interviews with six women⁵. These were recruited by means of notices in women's centers, sending mails via distribution lists and inquiries to trade unions. The interviews were transcribed and anonymized. The biographies of the sample were recorded by means of biographical guided interviews, which first asked (chronologically) about the biographical course and touched on certain areas of life (family, friendship, school, work, crises), and then asked about self-constructions, which were specifically intended to stimulate reflection ("Have you changed over time?").

⁵ One woman was interviewed twice, as the first interview was originally a trial interview. When the guide was subsequently adapted and the interview was evaluated after all, some questions had to be asked subsequently.

Sample

The sample (see Table 1) consists of six women between the ages of 28 and 66. Three women were between 29 and 35 years old at the time of the interview, three women between 58 and 66 years old. Accordingly, two generations were interviewed⁶. Four of the women were already mothers, and two were planning motherhood⁷. To determine the class position, the characteristics of educational attainment, professional qualification, and occupation, as well as inheritance and property situation were collected. Five participants have a secondary school diploma, another participant completed A levels, which was not recognized in Germany. As a housekeeping assistant in a large kitchen, she was undoubtedly part of the target group. At the time of the interviews, five women were living in rented accommodation; one participant had bought a small condominium in a working-class neighborhood in *city A* when she was a senior citizen. One of the women had already received an inheritance at the time of the interview, but it was so small that it did not result in a 'class change'. Another will receive an inheritance during her lifetime. These and similar blurbs are not uncommon in attempts to operationalize 'working-class' and must be decided on a case-by-case basis (see Braun et. al, 2008).

Table 1.

Name, Age	Education degree	Professional Qualification	Professional Occupations	Number of children	Family status
Julia, 66 years	secondary school diploma	Forwarding agent	Forwarding agent, unskilled labor	2 adult children	Married 2 times, divorced 1 time, Widowed
Nina 66 years	secondary school diploma	Industrial clerk, educator	Industrial clerk, Stenographer. Büro-tätigkeiten, educator	2 adult children	Married, Divorced, Partnership, Single and Singleparent
Dunja, 58 years	A-levels (Iran)	Housekeeping Help	unskilled labor, Housekeeping Help	1 adult child	Married, Divorced, Partnership, Singleparent

⁶ The question of whether so much has really changed for women from the working classes cannot be pursued further in this article, but can be read at the indicated place (Kalkstein, 2021).

⁷ The starting point of the study (Kalkstein, 2021), of which this article is an abridged version, was not compatibility or motherhood, but the question of central areas of life in which women from working-class backgrounds struggle particularly hard for agency. Motherhood and issues around compatibility only emerged as a central theme in the analysis. Although only four of the six women were already mothers, all of them had a relationship to motherhood: Planning to start a family soon also took up significant space in the interviews.

Maria, 32 years	secondary school diploma	Nurse practitioner	Nurse practitioner	No children yet	Partnership
Vanessa , 31 years	secondary school diploma	Social Assistant	Waitress, Social Assistant Vocational baccalaureate (currently 12th grade)	2 Children of preschool and primary school age	Partnership, Singleparent
Marion 28 years	secondary school diploma	Hotel manageress	Hotel manageress	No children yet	Partnership

Data Analysis

Critical-psychological research practice pursues the goal of "analyzing how people move within the contradictions of capitalist society, how they expand or renounce their subjective possibilities of determination - and with which (psychological) problems this is associated in each case" (Markard, 2010, p. 170). The focus here is on the conceptual pair of *restrictive vs. generalized agency* (see above), and its reflection in thinking and in the form of social relations.

In the first step of the analysis, the interviews were sorted thematically and examined for common central themes. The procedure was based on the open coding of Grounded Theory (Strauss & Corbin, 1998). From this, it was possible to reconstruct the common problematic situation of the participants in the negotiations about gainful employment, family planning, and family work.

In the second step, the analysis of the thematic complex of *(in)compatibility* thus elaborated was oriented towards the first two steps of the critical-psychological development figure (*Entwicklungsfigur*) (see Markard, 2009, p. 279ff; also Geffers, 2008). These are:

- (a) *the identification of the problem* (reconciling motherhood and work) and *reconstruction of the subjective view* of the person concerned.
- (b) the analysis and working through of the problem and *reformulation in critical-psychological analysis categories* (cf. chapter 3, theoretical re-framing).

Depending on the data situation of the interview, either both concrete *reasons and premises* can be reconstructed from the narratives of the individuals, since these are disclosed. Or they have to be "speculated" about, since they remain unclear in the interviews. This means the "attempt [...] to make clear the premise-reasons-relations, subjective theories, life-condition references that come up in the evaluation in such a way that they are not only reproduced or thematized, but

reflected upon and questioned with regard to the respective (i.e., also one's own) location-boundness – and thus become comprehensible for others in a methodologically proven way" (Markard, 2020, p. 39). At the end of each individual case analysis, there is accordingly the practical or intellectual answer to the problem as a premise-reasons-relation against the background of restrictive vs. generalized agency. The individual responses (*practice of (in-)reconciliation*) to the structural framework (*structural (in-)reconciliation*) were cross-compared with each other in order to develop axes along which differences and similarities can be described. Four heuristic dimensions have emerged from the empirics to describe them. These will be presented in the following.

5. Presentation of the central results: Practices of (in) reconciliation⁸

As presented in the theoretical section, women faced a situation of structural (in-) reconciliation that made it practically impossible for them to fulfill the norms of good motherhood while remaining financially independent. For reasons of space, the detailed elaboration of the respective situation of each interviewee must be omitted. This can be found in Kalkstein (2021, p. 107ff). Although the initial situations showed structural parallels, the practical responses to them could be distinguished along the following four dimensions:

- (a) relationship to norms of good motherhood
- (b) presence or absence of structural categories in the thought patterns
- (c) subjective assessment of the risk of financial dependence
- (d) quantity of social involvement outside the partnership.

These form the core of the findings of the study and are presented below as dimensions of practice and filled with content.

a) Relationship to norms of good motherhood

The normative relationship of the interview partners to motherhood, working life, and their compatibility was examined to see which subjective practices emerge from this relationship in response to a social structure that disadvantages women due to societal class relations. The evaluative pattern of the good mother can be reconstructed as particularly relevant, which to this day frames supposedly too much gainful employment of the mother (the extent varies historically) as a potential threat to the well-being of the child (Dreßler, 2018, p. 33).

Questions about the temporality of career exit influenced all women's negotiations at a normative level. Nina (66 y.) exited the workforce when she became pregnant (1972), while her husband, three years younger, continued to work and provide financial security for the family. This form of division of labor was not only socially expected at the time, but was also legally mandated (Notz,

⁸ The comprehensive presentation of the results is beyond the scope of this paper; it can be read in detail in Kalkstein (2021, p. 318ff). At this point, it will be limited to the central results along the four heuristic categories.

2016, p.100). When Marion (28 y.) is asked in the interview about her desire to have children, she answers that her partner now has a new job, which is why the "external circumstances fit" (Ma, 12:10). Both Nina (66 y.) and Marion (28 y.) refer – despite considerable age differences – to socially legitimized forms of gender-specific division of labor as a practice of (in-)reconciliation, which in both cases leads to financial dependence on the partner. But as a family, societal expectations and social norms could be fulfilled (maternal care and paternal financial security of the family). The legitimacy of gender-specific division of labor remains self-referential (it is right because it is customary). It is not named as risky in the sense of giving up financial autonomy. Within the framework of the existing society, however, the breadwinner model also has an enabling character; despite its restrictive characteristics (economic dependence on the partner), as long as the relationship remains stable, a double burden is also spared.

Julia (66 y.) and Maria (35 y.) choose a different path. They put themselves in a problematic relationship to norms and social expectations as to when (how 'early' or 'late') and to what extent it is apparently good or right to re-enter the workforce. In the interview, Maria (35 y.) carefully weighs up the socially expected period of time against her own needs:

Nowadays it's also possible that you give them up somewhere when you're only six months old. I mean, I think that's very early, but when they're a good year old, I think that's fine. (M_II, 5:33ff)

She expresses normative boundaries as well as possibility that her own needs (to return to work at an early age) do not meet social expectations. Maria evaluates it as possible in future to place her child in external care at the age of six months, but very early. But it remains an alternative, even if not the optimal one. Maternal primary responsibility is used as an orientation, even if it contradicts one's own needs. Subsequently, other alternatives are discussed, in which an external institution, rather than the mother herself, becomes responsible for the child's care at an early age. Comparable negotiations about the model of good motherhood with the main maternal responsibility can be found in the interview with Julia (66 y.). She tells about a biographical situation when she was a single parent looking for a daycare place in the mid-1970s and the district office told her there was none:

Then I said, 'Good! Then I'll have to leave him [son] here so I can go to work on Monday!' (J, 14:14ff).

As a mother, the threat to leave her one-and-a-half-year-old son behind at the district office if she was not provided with a kindergarten place violated social norms. Julia thus signaled a willingness to prioritize her gainful employment rather than her maternal duties. In doing so, the interviewee referred to the double burden of being responsible for her children and being employed:

From a health point of view, it would have been nicer to stay at home for three years. But how do you get back to work, that was hard enough as it was. (J, 31:16f)

The claims of good motherhood are experienced ambivalently, when parallel gainful employment had to be managed as a single parent. On the one hand, one had "not brought children into the world in order to have nothing at all from them" (J, 6:15), on the other hand, maternal main care was experienced as an external regulatory instance whose universal validity could be questioned depending on the situation. Maria (32 y.) also adds in the interview her plan to return to work early and to have the child cared for externally: "And I think that's good for a child, too." (M_II, 6:2) Since a supposedly too early entry into working life can be socially sanctioned, the decision to do so required one's own 'inner' or alternative system of norms and values that can be set against the sanctions. Although both interviewees were oriented toward the model of good motherhood, they still considered the possibility of violating it in exceptional cases in order to realize their own needs with regard to compatibility. Working is also weighted here as a factor in fulfilling one's own needs and desires. Agency is achieved here by setting oneself apart from expectations.

When Vanessa (31 y.) became pregnant unplanned at the age of 22, she found herself in precarious living and working conditions. Since her partner was studying and since she herself had neither vocational training nor a fixed employment contract, she received social benefits (ALG II) for several years. Poverty also contradicts the idea of good motherhood:

Sure, there were months when I had no more money a week before the end and the refrigerator was empty and I had to go to my father and he then lectured me on how to manage. And me as a mother and anyway, yes (V, 22:21ff).

From the principle of society, she found it justifiable to receive state transfer payments: "And I also find it completely legitimate." (V, 22:11f) The concern about being measured against standards from the outside was countered by a lack of opportunities and the violation of one's own interests and needs that would result from adhering to appropriate standards. She talks openly about violations of the law in the interview. In addition, having an environment that shared sub- or counter-cultural norms reduced the potential threat of social exclusion from falling short or violating social expectations. Her "really strong social network" (V, 20:23) empowered Vanessa because her social participation was maintained even when she violated norms and rules. Vanessa referred to a system of values and norms that placed different evaluative standards on individual practices and allowed her normative space. This made it possible to question practices of (in-)reconciliation that are socially (tendentially) negatively valued (motherhood and receiving social benefits) and were avoided by other interview participants.

b) Presence or absence of structural categories in the explanatory patterns

Forms of thinking represent not only the mental relationship to norms and proximities, but also that to the material conditions within which attempts are made to reconcile motherhood and working life. They are a correlate of practice. The analytical perspective of critical psychology asks whether one's own situation is related to the social structure or appears as an immediate problem (to be solved privately). Julia (66 y.) tells several times about her problems as a young woman to decide between motherhood and professional realization:

And the [boss, FK] also told me when I wanted to leave, the company is growing and I could then manage the shipping department and so. Unfortunately, these are things that I wasn't aware of, you know. When you're actually very, how should I say, girly and actually say, I want to get out of home, I want to have children. That was something very important to me! I know I would have believed it of myself, not just that others would believe it of me. But the female clock ticked so loudly and said: No! No! No! No! No! (J, 7:26ff)

It seemed to be her own responsibility to find a practical answer to the contradiction between the demands of motherhood and the need for occupational advancement. She formulates it in retrospect as always having to "manage her little family business and [keep] a lot in mind." (J, 8:24ff) This is in line with Speck's (2016, p. 38) statement that in the contemporary model of good motherhood, the mother is "responsible for a kind of small business." Structural double burden is reinterpreted as an individual ability to organize oneself 'well enough'. The practice of (in-)reconciliation results in an excessive amount of planning, organizing, and 'time management' – and "depression" (J, 15:43).

Motherhood lends itself to naturalizations in a special way, as it contains both societal and biological-nurturing components (Steins, 1994, p. 63ff). However, (intersectional) class boundaries and unsatisfactory working conditions are also seen as personal problems in the interviews. Maria (32 y.) talks about worsened working conditions as a nurse:

You worked a lot of extra hours because jobs were cut. [...] Then the first step was that I thought, okay, you have to apply for something else, you have to do something else. (M, 20:7ff)

During this time (2010 - 2013), large-scale industrial dispute and nursing strikes took place, directed against staff shortages in hospitals (Wolf, 2013, p. 16). In the quote above, the need for change is experienced as a necessary change in the 'private' (you have to apply away) - an individual solution possibly seemed more sensible and promising than participating in protests. Marion also mentions several times that her income was "really lousy" (Ma, 23:6). If the 28-year-old could have made up her mind again at the time of the interview, she does not know if she would go back to hotel management training, "just because of the pay" (Ma, 23:6). The salary of hotel specialists is on the borderline of low pay (WSI, 2013, p.6) and Marion considers herself responsible for having chosen a

low-paid profession. Julia experienced discrimination in the labor market as a mother and as a wage-dependent employee:

Yes, I had a very bad experience with a boss. [...] And then she called me in, because it was the probationary period, [...] and she was very satisfied with the work, but I should guarantee her that my child would not get sick, only then would she extend my contract. And then I said, despite all the hardship, give me the papers, I can't guarantee that. (J, 8:6ff)

In all cases, "particularly poor working conditions, particularly low pay [emerge], [...] without penetrating the appearance of possible 'wage justice,' without capturing the 'structural' nature of job insecurity and unemployment" (Holzkamp, 1985a, p. 366). The problem of low pay is not seen as a structurally bound class and gender relation. Working conditions were given, but they did not become the starting point of the double possibility: common representation of interests. However, it is also visible that women struggle in a restrictive way to expand their agency - and they succeed in doing so.

But what practices are realized when social aspects such as social inequality and gender relations are mapped in terms of their own situation? For the first time, Vanessa (31 y.) consciously perceived social inequality she switched to a gymnasium after elementary school. She experienced that she was "picked on" (V, 4:30) - because her parents were poorer. Structural inequality and unequal starting conditions were personally evident. Thus, Vanessa connected her immediate life situation as a mother with social structures of female double burden ("Of course I am doubly burdened" [V, 21:14f]). She defines her own experience of structural disadvantage as an injustice. From social references to social inequality and her own experience with it, a way of thinking was developed in which the societal-normative claim of having to secure one's own existence in an apparently private responsibility can be reinterpreted as a common task of the family and the circle of friends. Vanessa is currently dependent on social benefits when she tells us:

When I hear, 'Its hard for you, single parent and so on! I don't have to do many purchases for the kids. That's actually always taken care of, my mother takes care of that. Or my father did, when he was still alive. And that is actually my fortune. I receive a lot of gifts from the outside. I do have friends who are good to me. And my boyfriend is good to me. That is, no, that holds the balance. So that's, everything goes. I can also go to the movies. I can also go on vacation and I do that. (V, 19:23ff)

Vanessa also lent money when she had financially 'better' periods:

I: [...] So how do you assess your financial situation?

V: Critical. Critical at the moment. But I have good friends who have also lent me a lot of money. And I have also lent a lot of money in the last few months. (V, 19:12f)

Against the background of social inequality, the need-oriented redistribution of money becomes a principle and a social practice, whereby one's own and others' life situations are understood within social inequality. The connection between social inequality, gender relations, and conditions of production and reproduction is not theoretically reconstructed, but nevertheless a conception of society as a social mediating instance existed.

Dunja, on the other hand, sees her working and living conditions as rooted in the "capitalist state and system" (D, 28:22), in the contradiction between ownership and non-ownership. She describes herself as a Marxist in the interview and it is evident that she reconstructs social problems and her life situation against the background of Marxian thought:

I've always been a worker. I have always had a boss. I have lived with a low wage. Or with two jobs. And yes, I always think that work is exploitation. You get up in the morning, then you leave, and then you come home at 4 pm. And what do you have in your hand? And what do you earn? (D, 27:27ff)

Her situation appears to her to be rooted in the global conditions of production and reproduction, as well as gender relations, "especially for women, it's (working, FK) a double job." (D, 28:2f)

Although Dunja feels constrained to provide for her livelihood (and that of her daughter) in a private way ('two jobs'), she does not see herself as directly personally accountable for her situation, nor does she face an unchangeable social structure on which she has no influence. In her view, the condition for change is not individual effort, but social struggles for "equal rights for all people financially, in all things" (D, 28:30f)

D: I always have hope and I live with my hope. I always think, one day all the workers will wake up, they will realize what is happening. Because, maybe then it will be completely different.

I: Change of circumstances?

D: That's coming, that's coming. (D, 28:16ff)

c) Subjective assessment of the risk of financial dependence

The interviewees often describe experiences of financial dependence. Before it appears and becomes noticeable as such, it usually manifests itself as a gender-specific, traditional division of labor. This is partly a satisfactory and desired practice. Nina (66 y.) had completed an apprenticeship as an industrial clerk. When she became pregnant (1972), she left the labor force altogether. She was involved in the family, met her mother for washing, maintained social contacts. "My parents, my mom, they supported me quite well there." (N, 14:27f) In the interview, she justifies her re-entry into the workforce with the fact that the possibility of traditional work and role division was no longer given after the divorce: "Because I had to work again." (N, 4:21f) In contrast, Julia (66 y.) and Vanessa (31 y.) found themselves in an unwanted practice of gender-specific-

traditional division of labor within the partnership after their first child. Julia did not find a part-time job in her original qualification level and started "working at home" (J, 6:26) far below her qualification. At the same time, she took care of the joint children. This work annoyed, isolated, and overworked her:

Well, that's annoying, you know. [...] When I had a 120-page assignment, I wrote until ten in the evening. That was of course hard, because the kids were often sick or something, you could have them at home, but you couldn't concentrate very well, especially when you have such a hyperactive child like the big one. With Philipp I could say, play now, mummy comes to the side. And with the big one it was very, very difficult. (J, 6:26ff)

Subsequently, she worked "in the laundry [...], by the hour," then in a pipe cleaning business and in a chocolate factory. "The main thing was to earn a few marks." (J, 7:1) Her husband financed the family for the most part and "retreated completely" (J, 15:16).

Julia took care of the children, worked, and she had "the household under control" (J, 15:13). But she suffered emotionally from the situation: "I always had depression during that time, of course." (J, 15:26) Julia, well qualified and with a desire to remain gainfully employed, found only low-wage jobs as a mother of two. Her income was so low that she only "earned two-thirds of the rent" (J, 30:34f), the rest of the household income being acquired by her partner. The *practice of (in-)reconciliation* is similar to Nina's (J, 66), but satisfaction differs in advance.

Vanessa also stayed at home for a year and a half and then "[w]ith a bit of a job" (V, 13:30). She received ALG II for a total of four years. Vanessa's partner, the children's father, continued to qualify at university despite parenthood, while Vanessa dropped out of the workforce altogether. Like Julia, Vanessa found herself unhappily shouldering the quasi-sole responsibility of raising children. She "was just really alone a lot and also sad about it" (V, 14:3f). Both planned to take on somehow more responsibility for childcare, but then had the impression of being entirely responsible for the children on their own.

Traditional gender division of labor did not appear as financial dependency until the case of separation and divorce. This is because the practice is based on conditions of normality and stability that do not always materialize. The partnership must remain stable and both partners must share the income equally. Nina (66 years old) had been unemployed for five years when the marriage broke up:

I didn't work then either, I was financially dependent on my husband. [...] Then I also lived for a short time from the social welfare office. But it was not so easy to go there. I had problems with that, I must say. (N, 15:19ff)

In her eyes, receiving social welfare came unexpectedly. Separations and divorces are usually not planned, while traditional divisions of labor are entered into. They are only statistically, but not subjectively predictable and thus belong to the subjective unplannability. Julia (66 y.) was also still on parental leave

during the divorce, which meant a considerable financial, logistical and organizational effort.

But now first see, how do you manage? At that time there was a law that you could still get unemployment benefits up to two years after the birth. But you had to register as a job seeker and that meant looking for a place in kindergarten. That was difficult, of course. But then I registered, looked for work, and then found one [...]. Then I had four more months of unemployment benefit and then I separated. That is, it is not so easy to separate, not. (J, 14:3ff)

Vanessa (31 y.) was also separated at the time of the interview. The economic dependency (on the ex-partner or on social benefits), leads to economic precarity in case of separation and divorce. Furthermore, an additional educational effort followed:

Of course, I am doubly burdened. And I am often also really tired. And also angry and desperate. (V, 21:17f)

Vanessa sums up though: "But in the end I feel better." (V, 21:18) But the stress of a separation combined with economic dependence on the partner and the perspective of being a single parent and not earning much afterwards, leads in other cases to the conclusion that a separation seemed unmanageable. Julia's second marriage did not work out well. When the therapist advised her to separate, this had brought her "close to such a 'suicide attempt'" (J, 25:1f). Julia did not see herself coping with a divorce, nor could she bear the idea of staying in the marriage:

How am I supposed to manage all this! First of all, I fought for survival, actually, for years. And then my second husband started drinking even more. That's when you have the right touch! I just wanted to realize how I'm going to do it, how I'm going to manage it! With the apartment, with the children? Because one thing was clear, I would have dared to live with Philipp [2nd son]. But where should Steffen [1st son] go? To the first father, who drinks. With the stepfather, there's no right at all. (J, 25:2ff)

The fact that separations and divorces were a burden cannot be understood independently of the assignment of female caring responsibilities and the accompanying social assumption and high willingness of the interviewees themselves to forego financial autonomy in favor of motherhood. Julia had the impression of being trapped in the marriage situation, of not being able to change or end it on her own. But it is also the social conditions that drive women into this situation.

On the one hand, they are supposed to take on the main responsibility for child-rearing and caring activities; on the other hand, there was no social structure available to them that would provide relief in the case of separation and divorce. I understand this as an objective risk of traditional gender-specific division of labor. In the process, the minimal financial security one had through

one's own salary is abandoned. The collective repression of this circumstance can certainly be understood as an attempt to circumvent the powerlessness that this situation can trigger. But only the confrontation with it, can give insight into the necessity of its change and drive to generalized forms of agency.

d) Social inclusion: Paths to self-determination

It also turned out that social relationships and involvement outside of the partnership made a fundamental difference in the experienced opportunities for shaping life and the forms they took. Some women were more socially involved than others. Important social relationships included friendships, parents, and siblings. Nina (66 y.) was supported by her parents from the beginning when she became a mother at the age of 23. In the interview she tells:

I was actually quite, how do you say, secure [after birth, FK]. My parents, my mom, they supported me quite well. I can't say anything else. [...] Everything was new for me. It wasn't wanted, let's put it that way. [...] But as I said, I had a lot of support from home. (N, 14:27ff)

Family support made the transition and coping with the demands as a mother easier. While at this point, she foregrounds the emotional support of parents (sheltered), in coping with the divorce and its financial consequences, economic help also became relevant:

But my parents, my sister, they also supported me, again. As a family, we have always stuck together. (N, 15:30f)

She emphasizes cohesion with her parents and sister, who also supported her financially, because her husband refused to pay alimony ("I even had to sue him, it all went through a lawyer."). [N, 15:20f]). And although Nina was a single parent for the next six years, she completed two retraining programs and found a permanent job as a kindergarten teacher in her mid-30s.

The support in the supervision and education of the children was also decisive for Vanessa's (31 y.) further professional qualification. When asked about difficulties as a single parent, she replies:

I get quite a lot of gifts from the outside. So that's, anything goes. I can also go to the movies. I can also go on vacation and I do that. (V, 19:24ff)

She also emphasizes at another point:

I just also have a really strong social network. For example, [male friend] also looks after the children from time to time. They know him well and I have, well, I have male role model functions for them. My brother lives on the next street. My friend. (V, 20:22ff)

The function of the family of friends includes emotional and economic support, the willingness to (also) take on educational tasks, and the function of a solidarity community. Vanessa finds herself several times in the situation of not having enough money to live. There was no need for serious accountability. Vanessa's family and friends "stand up for each other. " (V, 22:25f) Within the social network, the circle of friends takes over family tasks through economic support⁹. The demands of reproductive work and financial security thus had to be carried only in part by her, opening up other spaces of opportunity despite her low income.

How important social relationships can be in breaking free from financial dependencies is shown by Julia (66 y.), whose early adult life was characterized by isolation and lack of social contacts. Julia's "first real friend" (J, 25:28f) was in her 20s, when she became a mother for the first time. When she moved with her husband to metropolitan-A, 600 kilometers away, she had "[missed] that, of course, after the move." (J, 25:33) The father committed suicide and the mother lived in a nursing home. Without parental support and further isolated, Julia filed for divorce. She justifies the second marriage with the fact that she expected relief:

And that year I couldn't have done it without him [second husband]. He took all his vacation time because Steffen [first son] was sick a lot. [...] We somehow fit together well as a team. My second husband was a good craftsman and he always felt I might need him. (J, 14:21)

Julia saw remarriage as a way to cope with multiple stresses that she had previously faced not only being divorced and a single parent, but also without the support of a circle of friends or family. At the same point, she describes being underweight and a six-week stay in the hospital as consequences of the overload. Without the 'really strong social network', as Vanessa puts it, and the security of a family of origin that provided protection and support, as in Nina's case, the demands of motherhood and working life could not be managed without a partner. When the second marriage for Julia also went badly and Julia again considered separation in early 1990, she became desperate. A divorce with two children in the meantime seemed unmanageable to her:

How am I supposed to manage all this! First of all, I fought to survive, actually, for years. And then my second husband started drinking even more. (J, 25:2ff)

Julia did not separate. The only friend with whom she had deeper contact saw her "about once a month" (J, 26:4). Opportunities for interpersonal cooperation, help, and solidarity hardly existed. Julia saw no way for herself to change and break free from the dependencies and burdens: "There is no way out. But, believe me,

⁹ The generative transmission of economic support is the social norm: Parents support their children financially and are legally obliged to do. They bequeath their wealth to their children. Although none of the women comes from a 'higher-earning' household, economic support plays a role in all six interviews. The special role of the extra-familial economic solidarity network, as found in Vanessa's case, should be emphasized at this point.

one has been depressed many times." (J, 26:20) She would have needed cooperation and support to cope with the separation and raising her sons alone. Private relationships such as friendships, peer groups, parents and siblings are particularly conducive when the interviewees are trying to break free from dependencies (in the case of divorce or separation as well as professional training). In the absence of such private relationships or if they are only rudimentary, an endeavor such as separations could appear in the subjective frame of the unfeasible.

Another relevant form of social involvement was activities in formal groups. Nina (66 y.) highlights several times that she was a member of the basketball club from adolescence "until she was a senior citizen" (N, 5:15). The club was a place of competition and success as well as exchange and meeting:

We then also had success pretty quickly, because we then became second, there, in the [name] championship and then we always played tournaments and so. And then we also traveled around a lot within Germany and so on. [...] [And] when we had games on the weekend, [...] then my sister always picked me up and then we always drove around within the city of A. And that was fun, yeah. And that was fun, yes. [...] And my daughter, she came along a lot, on weekends we were out and about playing basketball. (N, 5:19ff)

Nina practiced regularly and participated in games on weekends during the season. Her sporting activity was a family spectacle: partner, children and sister came together regularly. She also says it was a teammate who recommended that she retrain as an educator after her divorce: "I heard from a sports teammate, they're looking for employees in an educator's job." (N, 3:30f) The formal group thus became a place for informal exchange. Social contacts were made, knowledge was exchanged, and paths and opportunities were illuminated that might have remained closed without membership in the association.

Another group biographically highlighted by Nina is a local group for single mothers:

And only there [in the women's group, FK], only there I became somehow more self-confident, I think. And I was no longer isolated like I used to be. (N, 12:33ff)

In the case of the women's group, not only was social participation and exchange important, but also acceptance and understanding. By attending the group, Nina learned about different, tested ways of responding to the problems of single parents (e.g., increased problems of compatibility, problems with alimony payments, possible dependence on state social benefits, which are perceived as unpleasant) that had already proven to be workable or not.

Women's groups can make it understood that experiences are structured based on social inequality categories, contributing to the pervasiveness of immediacy. They can also be places of joint representation of interests.

One of the interviewees is an active trade union member and works council member at her workplace in order to represent and defend labor law interests as a wage-dependent employee. She negotiates with superiors, too.

At the beginning of the unions, people worked 50 hours or had no holidays. They fought very, very hard. And they got rights. But unfortunately, the new generation, today's generation, loses the rights again very quickly. But they don't think about the fact that these people fought for these rights. Such rights, nobody comes and says 'Here you go.' People fought for them and got them. Now we're losing them again real fast. (D, 28:10ff)

Dunja understands formal groups as a place where interests and needs are thought of from a social position. They are communities of solidarity with strangers that are not entered into on the basis of sympathy or shared hobbies, but on the basis of shared positions and interests. In most interviews, social relationships and friendships are not seen as a possibility of collective interests(representation), with which generalized agency can also be won.

6. Discussion and Outlook

In the present paper, I have summarized the results of a comprehensive biographical study (Kalkstein, 2021) and significantly shortened them in many places. Nevertheless, it is to be hoped that the results are comprehensible and conclusive. At the beginning of the article, the state of research was used to show the situation of mothers in low-paid jobs and at the same time to highlight how many women still face considerable difficulties in standing on their own two feet financially. In addition to structural problems, the norms that are applied to mothers and the idea of a natural female competence advantage with regard to child rearing were addressed. This abstract description has replaced the concrete description of the situation of the individual interview partners at this point; it can be read in detail if interested (*ibid.*). Despite the initial situation described as *structural (in-)reconciliation*, it was shown that mothers consider different possibilities of acting for themselves depending on individual conditions and premises and open up or close off corresponding spaces for action.

In relation to norms, it was shown that this can be interpreted with varying degrees of rigidity and that some women also make use of this leeway. The relationship that emerges is relatively simple: the more one can distance oneself from norms, the newer spaces for action emerge. After all, with regard to motherhood and compatibility, women from working classes are evaluated on the basis of norms that are oriented toward the lifestyle of the middle classes (Speck, 2016, p. 60; Dreßler, 2018, p. 67f).

But those who turn away from social norms run the risk of social exclusion. The degree to which the threat of social exclusion was experienced through norm violation sometimes depends on the salience, quality, and norm and value structure of the immediate social environment. Thus, it was no coincidence that it was Vanessa, who had herself grown up in a sub- and counterculture, who saw the greatest scope for herself to turn away from norms - to the limits of legality.

Under b) the question of structural categories was discussed. There was a qualitative difference in how the women felt whether they perceived their

situation as an expression of individual failure or whether they could relate it to social inequality or societal conditions as a whole. Poverty and motherhood increasingly appear as the result of inverted (or completely lacking) individual planning¹⁰ (McRobbie, 2010, p. 176f; Malich, 2014, p. 159). In the interviews, the financial situation as a mother is one of the key topics but is not always framed as a political-social problem. Motherhood represents the core of the material difference between men and women in Germany (Barišić/Consiglio, 2020, p. 4f). Again, the greatest emotional despair was shown where one's own situation is experienced in an individualized way. Julia's despair even drives her to attempt suicide (this can certainly not be explained monocausally as an individualizing form of thinking, but it does not remain completely irrelevant either). In the media, there are hardly any critical discourses about the financial situation of mothers: financial problems remain surprisingly quiet. Dominant forms of thinking are also subject to societal guiding and popular sciences (which currently include psychology), which influence everyday understanding. Critical psychology points out that the understanding of everyday life within the existing social structure is susceptible to the individualization of socio-structural problems, because individualizing forms of thinking start with what can be directly experienced: First of all, everyone is responsible for themselves and for the success of life tasks - such as compatibility. It also became apparent that it was precisely the recognition of a structural situation in one's own situation that opened up the possibility of solidarity and emotional comfort, as Nina experienced in the women's group for single parents.

Against this background, the results under c), the subjective assessment of the risk of financial dependence, can also be classified. They show a clear tendency to underestimate the risks of traditional, gendered family work. The functionality of this immediately strikes home: without the repression of the risks, neither the desire to actually take care of one's offspring can be pursued, nor can part-time work with a small number of hours be seen as a satisfactory compromise. It is precisely society's repression of this extremely uncertain initial situation that allows it to keep shifting the restriction on maternal agency, but not to lift it. With divorce rates ranging from 22% (1975) to 35% (2015) (Radenacker, 2018, p. 7), women seem to underestimate the risk of gendered division of labor to them. Often couples live relatively egalitarian relationship concepts until childbirth and then lapse into a traditionally gendered division of labor (Kortendiek, 2010). This happens even if it was previously planned differently by the couple (Flaake, 2014, p. 140f). Although studies indicate that the acceptance of equal partnership has increased, there is - in the words of Kerschgen (2010, p. 8) - a "gap between a verbal openness and a simultaneous behavioral rigidity, especially with regard to men and their participation in family work". The one-sided reference to the increased occupation of mothers can be understood in the language of critical psychology as leading to the "repression, denial, dissociation, mystification" (Holzkamp, 1985a, p. 379) of the risk of financial dependency, from which emerge the "participation in my

¹⁰ This refers to the dominant media representation. Other representations can also be found, but they are more marginal (see also McRobbie, 2010; Skeggs, 2005, 2001).

oppression" (ibid.), the restrictive entanglements of one's practices – an aspect Holzkamp identifies in domination-bearing social forms of thought (ibid.).

In this regard, the present study points to the importance of mothers' informal social involvement. In the narrated biographies it becomes clear that social support is essential in order to be able to attempt to realize independent life plans as a mother. The importance of the social integration of mothers from working classes for the possibilities of self-determined lifestyles with regard to compatibility has hardly been researched so far. The present study provides initial evidence that in times of financial hardship and periods of emotional overload, social relationships are an important resource for coping with the demands of work and family life without becoming psychologically or emotionally overwhelmed. If the children's partners and/or fathers are not integrated into family work to the extent needed, the social environment becomes an important factor in making reconciliation (more) self-determined.

There is a need for further research in this direction: On the one hand, the importance of social integration of mothers from the working classes in order to break free from restrictive and dependency-promoting arrangements would have to be investigated specifically and in depth. This remains to be investigated both from a subjective point of view (for one's own satisfaction, psychological well-being, etc.) and with a view to the material side, for example related to financial independence. The study by Braun et al. (2008) indicates that mothers from the working classes are more at risk of entering a period of isolation after childbirth than mothers from the middle classes. This is attributed to the fact that many typical ventures for mothers with their young children tend to be commercial (early music education, etc.) or focused on visiting each other's homes. Mothers from the working classes often do not have the appropriate spatial and financial resources. Together with the results from the present work, this points to the importance of low-threshold, free-of-charge offers of encounter.

The lack of thematization of financial dependency evident in the interviews calls for further research regarding the question of how women, if they want children, later 'think' about themselves financially (and what reasons they have for doing so in each case).

Here, further research remains desirable that not only reconstructs women's orientations and tacit knowledge around motherhood (e.g. the study by Dreßler, 2018), but also approaches that give space to discuss the ideal of the good mother and examine it for its restrictive parts. In any case, with regard to practices of motherhood and reconciliation, there remains a need for further research that defines class not merely as socioeconomic status, but likewise as a social relation of power and inequality from which opportunities and obstacles emanate.

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How the reference to common sense psychological concepts de-thematises gender inequality: A couple's interview on tensions in an egalitarian relationship model

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Abstract

Social scientific studies show that gender inequalities within couples' relationships continue despite the widespread ideal that relationships in the 'West' were – in the meantime – primarily egalitarian in nature. This therefore opens up an ambivalence for everyday couple life: While the narrative of equality may direct couples as an *ideal*, it is the socio-political structures that frame everyday life *practice*, some aspects of which, in subtle forms, precisely do not enable equality. In this article, we therefore explore the question of how a couple who identifies their relationship model as egalitarian negotiates this ambivalence with each other in their everyday lives and focus on the role of their common sense psychological knowledge: Which role does it play when experiencing a conflict between ideal and practice? We present a qualitative case study of a couple's interview. The results highlight that the couple de-thematises tensions due to pervading gender-inequality structures by two strategies: the first draws on common sense psychological knowledge to justify a rather orthodox distribution of roles by making use of narratives of personality traits and self-expression. The second strategy of de-thematising gender equality conflicts is a switch from telling concrete stories about their lives (e.g., when the male part feels offended by the female doing too little in the household) to negotiating their ideals (gender-equality should exist on general societal level).

Keywords

de-thematisation, egalitarian relationship model, gender inequality, psychological common sense knowledge, tensions

Introduction

Young women in countries of the Global North increasingly grow up with a rhetoric of choice that poses that every woman can choose her own life free from (patriarchal) restrictions. However, social and/or cultural scholars currently critically interrogate this trope. For instance, they argue that young women frequently stress that they – mostly considered as White middle-class women – have already won full gender equality and view ‘feminism’ an antiquated concept that could not sufficiently adapt to the diverse needs of a new generation (Rowe-Finkbeiner, 2004). This rhetoric on already established gender equality feeds into discourses on modern, respectively egalitarian relationship models, which assume that men and women meet in relationships at eye level and conduct their relationship as equals. This is in line with narratives proposed by modernity theories that emphasise that ‘modernity’ is providing individuals with a chance to choose ‘life’ individually everyday anew (Beck, 1992 or Giddens, 1991). What is considered evidence for the gender equality is that women can succeed in formerly ‘manly’ domains: they can make a professional career, as it used to be reserved for men, and can become more visible on behalf of their own choices, to name but a few (Budgeon, 2001; Harris, 2004). Especially from a feminist view on structures of patriarchy, McRobbie (2009, p. 46) criticises that stressing this freedom of choice and individualism masks “the continued existence of gender hierarchies and the perhaps more subtle ways in which these are constantly being reproduced”. She also argues that neoliberal policies perpetuate a de-politicisation and exposes women to the competition of capitalist markets which are permeated with still pervading gender hierarchies – in part precisely through the de-politicisation. More recently, McRobbie (2020, p. 76) analyses that “work and career become goals instead of struggles for changes to work and for gender equality. (...) Employment for women becomes a defining mark of status and identity”. She highlights the role of the media, specifically “the informal power of social media, to create a new moral economy of gender, which legitimates the further dismantling of social security and the welfare state” (McRobbie, 2020, pp. 96-97). Therefore, the field of ‘modern’, egalitarian relationships seems to be more ambivalent than the modernity theory of individualism proposes.

Feminist-critical scholars also emphasise that we need to understand more about the “affective” and “psychic life” (Gill, 2017) in order to be able to explore how the concrete ways in which people deal with such ambivalences promote gender inequality in everyday life. Consequently, we argue that an analysis of a couple’s concrete relationship practice – a close look into heterosexual couple’s interactions and negotiations in the private sphere – is essential for exploring how gender inequalities can persist even within couples committed to an egalitarian relationship model within a wider culture that values gender equality. Interestingly, Csurgó & Kristóf (2017) published a study on the span of egalitarian relationship-norms and practices, analysing a Hungarian sample of elite couples. As the authors stress, the Hungarian elite is a “social group who still experience significant gender imbalance, even in most gender-egalitarian countries” (p. 2108). Amongst other findings, their analysis suggests that a) the

egalitarian relationship model is considered a norm on which the couples must take a stance b) that it creates tensions when the couples do not live up to this norm. According to the authors, these tensions could be minimised by externalising the problems to a higher level of e.g. politics and/or by arguing that ‘the elite’ being predefines rather orthodox gender relations.

Against this background, in this article we present an in-depth analysis of a couple’s interview and explore the strategies this couple uses to cope with emerging conflicts and ambivalences in their everyday lives that concern gender inequality. We argue that a single-case analysis is appropriate because it allows us to interpret in detail what the individual statements mean in their respective (social) context, how they develop further and what overall “gestalt” their practice takes on. Therefore, our analysis by the Documentary Method can further develop Csurgó’s and Kristóf’s finding of externalising conflicts from the individual sphere to a political sphere and follow Gill’s call for understanding in more detail the “affective” and “psychic life” by examining whether and to what extent everyday psychological knowledge plays a role in coping with these tensions. We aim at deciphering where (pseudo) psychological formulas and knowledge are referred to in everyday life and to what extent this plays a role in negotiating (political) gender issues in everyday couple life. To employ a critical perspective on practicing gender-equality in everyday practice, we will frame our analysis by the current state-of-the-art knowledge of the postfeminist critique of contemporary representations of femininity. In our analysis and critical examination of the couple’s interview, we will highlight the role of everyday psychological references, especially where the couple either reports on conflicts of equal action in everyday life, or talks about more orthodox gender roles. We then continue with a description of the methodical approach and, finally, proceed with a detailed presentation of the qualitative single case study.

Postfeminist critique deciphers existing gender inequalities

We have argued so far that the ‘modern’ egalitarian forms of relationship outlined above are riddled with ambivalences arising from neoliberal policies, de-politicisation and still persisting gender inequalities. To make such ambivalences accessible to analysis, we make use of a postfeminist critique. Mainly from cultural- and social-theoretical points of view, postfeminist criticism proposes that pop-cultural discourses construct subjects by the following features (Gill, 2007, p. 147): (1) free choice and decision making (2) emphasis on individuality, (3) repudiation of feminism, (4) focus on competition, self-surveillance, self-discipline, (5) emphasis on the subjected (not anymore primarily objectified) female body. Even though ‘classical’ feminism – the “bra-burning women, women who refuse to shave their legs or armpits and angry man-hating ‘femi-nazi’ lesbians” (Riley et al., 2018, p. 3) – is repudiated, feminism has not ‘vanished’ but was rather fed into pop-cultural discourses, making it more acceptable and ‘fancy’, thereby less threatening (McRobbie, 2009). By explicitly accentuating stereotypic (hyper)femininity, women do not

jeopardise the classic male/female heterosexual order. By an analysis of the media discourse, McRobbie (2009) shows how women's participation in the education and labour market is portrayed as an indicator of fully actualised gender equality. Departing from that, she stresses that female visibility in the form of the "well educated working girl" (McRobbie, 2009, p. 72) is subject to various restrictions and that it comes with a price: According to McRobbie, the working girl must "learn how to dress so that she too embodies 'complete perfection'" and at the same time she must "remain endearingly feminine", must show "conventional female vulnerability" (2009, p. 79). Importantly, this masks persisting inequalities in the gendered division of labour that have been described as women's 'double burden' – being involved in both paid labour and unpaid family and household responsibilities and as typical for neoliberalism.

Additionally, Gill (2007) suggests that there is no coherent picture of 'the postfeminist femininity', but rather, she identifies a "distinctive sensibility" (Gill, 2007, p. 147) – constructed and offered by discourses – that provides female individuals with a "way of making sense about what it means to be a woman and to live a good life" (Riley et al., 2018, p. 1). The entanglement of related discursive subject positions and the ways in which people navigate them in their everyday lives has been of major interest in various contemporary social-scientific and psychological research efforts. Over the past years, interdisciplinary studies have increasingly focussed on how women – though primarily in Anglo-American areas (dominantly UK, Australia, New Zealand, USA) – negotiate their subjective images of femininity in relation to postfeminist narratives in their everyday lives. Referring to the focus of this article, we argue that there is lack in knowledge when it comes to *doing couple*, especially when couples position themselves as modern/egalitarian. This refers to the question how heterosexual romantic partners explicitly negotiate their gender positions and divisions of labour in the private sphere in relation to each other and how gender (in)equality is enacted in everyday practice. As we have already emphasised above, we also address the question of whether and to what extent everyday psychological knowledge plays a role in this. This interest is not accidental, as both Gill (2007) and newer also McRobbie (2020) repeatedly – though not explicitly – address the fact that psychological concepts such as knowledge about personality traits and/or concepts such as 'resilience' play a role in postfeminist discourses. Gill (2007), for example, argues that there has been a shift from the naturalisation of gender (a man is like this because a man is like this from birth) to a form of psychologisation: a man is like this because it is his personality. She reconstructs this narrative as she reads self-help literature critically: Her point is to show that in her reading of this literature, the difference in character between women and men is important because it keeps the sexes attractive to each other (following the narrative 'opposites attract').

McRobbie (2020) is less explicit about the importance of psychological concepts in postfeminist discourses: She originally analysed pop-cultural film products in the early 2000s – such as *Sex and the City* or *Bridget Jones* – and derived from this the ambivalence between, on the one hand, the reference to feminist values (the 'phallic girl' in leading roles: women can also become

visible in male domains) while at the same time, heteronormative love and relationships are still represented as the most fundamental source of happiness for a woman (McRobbie, 2009). In one of her more recent publications (McRobbie, 2020), she states though that the ways in which pop cultural media products consider feminism while at the same time maintaining entangled with the patriarchal matrix (mainstreaming feminism), has changed over the years. McRobbie (2020, p. 7, pp. 42-72) analyses ‘modern’ capitalist resilience rhetoric and states that feminist claims (such as a “capacity for reflexivity”) allow young women to use it as a kind of “therapeutic strategy” while at the same time commercialising feminism (it is for instance celebrities such as Lady Gaga who advocate against body shaming, embracing how we were “born this way”). She analyses “three interconnected elements” on how feminism is “mainstreamed” (McRobbie, 2020, p. 42):

These are the ‘perfect’, which appertains to lifestyle and the terrain of the feminine ‘good life’; the ‘imperfect’, which offers some scope (but within carefully demarcated boundaries) for criticism of and divergence from these ideals; and finally ‘resilience’, which becomes the favoured tool and therapeutic instrument for recovery and repair. (McRobbie, 2020, p. 42)

We can see that two psychological concepts play a role at this point: ‘resilience’ and ‘perfectionism’. Even though McRobbie ‘borrows’ terms from psychology, she does not reflect the power of these psychological concepts. We argue, that in a social order that relies strongly on individualisation (in a neoliberal logic, everyone is the architect of their own happiness), the everyday use of scientific psychological terms becomes important in everyday life negotiations.

An empirical approach to the tacit knowledge in a couple’s everyday practice

In order to empirically address on the one hand, which ambivalences of gender (in)equality are experienced and negotiated in day-to-day couple life, and on the other hand, which role the reference to everyday psychological knowledge plays in this, we suggest that we need an analysis of *explicitly* negotiated positions and the *implicit, tacit* knowledge that is embedded in everyday practice. We will address these two layers of explicit and implicit knowledge in a twofold way: (1) On the level of data collection, we use a semi structured interview with a couple on their everyday life as a couple and gender issues in their relationship. (2) With regards to data interpretation, we employ the Documentary Method (Bohnsack, 2014). (1) Interviews with couples are explicitly suitable for examining gender relations (Przyborski & Wohlrab-Sahr, 2014, p. 111), as researchers gain in-vivo insight into couples’ (talking) practice. The interview started with an open introductory stimulus (“please tell me about all the experiences you made as a couple”), leaving enough space for interviewees to narrate what is relevant to them in their everyday practice. This employs the principle of openness that is a crucial standard practice in social-scientific interviewing as it allows participants

to enfold their frame of reference (Mruck and Mey 2005). The first open interview phase was followed by questions that aimed at further developing selected topics the interviewees had previously touched on. Subsequently, another set of more reflexive questions was directed at what the interviewees thought about media representations regarding gender and gender inequality more specifically. With this procedure, both everyday practice knowledge and reflexive knowledge can be accessed.

(2) These two types of knowledge are also at the heart of the Documentary Method of interpretation, which we used to analyse the data. The Documentary Method – to some extent similar to discursive methods – aims at deciphering speaking practice as a social enterprise. It reconstructs patterns of incorporated social practice by drawing on Mannheim's (1980) concept of the so-called 'conjunctive experience' and – by that – goes beyond the face value of the uttered content. Thus, it helps identifying rhetorical patterns that provide insights into the ways in which gender inequalities are masked. This helps us understand how structures of the patriarchal systems tacitly works through talk.

To better understand how the Documentary Method works, we now expand on its basics. Mannheim had shown that due to the social positions individuals inhabit in their everyday lives, they develop a tacit knowledge that guides everyday practice (*Handlungswissen*). This implicit knowledge that is self-evident to individuals who share the same milieu becomes 'conjunctive' as it is produced by shared practices and interactions of individuals. Therefore, this type of knowledge – as is developed in daily practice – is enmeshed in our *doing* and is oftentimes not reflexive. To trace this implicit knowledge, the Documentary Method distinguishes two levels of knowledge: Reflexive, communicable knowledge on the one hand and implicit, a-theoretic knowledge on the other hand. The first type of knowledge refers to what individuals can directly articulate and is addressed methodically by the first step of interpretation called 'formulating interpretation' that mainly consists in summarising the themes and content of the interview or discussion (Bohnsack 2014, 225). The second step addresses implicit knowledge by the so-called 'reflecting interpretation'. This interpretation step aims to move beyond directly uttered contents and to identify tacit patterns of perception, thinking and acting that guides a person's actions/interaction: 'orientations', as they are called in the Documentary Method (Bohnsack 2010, 111). Importantly, the Documentary Method proposes that these orientations come to fore once we decipher the performativity of language. Therefore, during analysis, we focus on the performative sequence of speaking-acts (how does one utterance follow the other, what is particular about an utterance beyond the content). In terms of analysis, the transcript is categorised in different forms of discourse that organises the talk, e.g. "proposition", "elaboration", "divergence", "conclusion", etc.. For instance, statements wherein an orientation is documented for the first time is called a 'proposition'. Elaborations are identified when an orientation is further developed by the talk of the interviewee(s). A divergence is an utterance that is seemingly expressed within the framework of what was previously proposed, but in fact the participants are talking past each other. After categorising the text by the forms

of discourse, it is further interpreted by its semantic meaning. It is thus paramount to view utterances in their specific context and in their specific sequential order to identify the “inner logic” of the talk.

The Documentary Method thus aims at tackling the ‘untold’ stories and conceptualises these via the notion of orientation (reflecting interpretation) but does not neglect the content of what is explicitly said by interviewees (formulating interpretation). By differentiating the content of talk from the ways in which it is performed and organised, the Documentary Method can shed light on a couple’s explicit theories of gender-(in)equality, but also on the underlying frameworks of orientation that guide the practice of a gendered division of labour that does not necessarily need to correspond to their explicit theories. A detailed account of the methodical benefits the Documentary Method has for analysing research questions that tackle the ideal vs. practice gap can be found in Hametner et al. (2022).

The Case Study

Based on the introduction, the meta-theoretical framing of the postfeminist critique and the methodical approach of the Documentary Method, we now present a detailed, qualitative analysis of a heterosexual couple talking about their relationship. The interviewed couple – Jane² and Mike – is in their mid-end twenties to early thirties, White and lives in Austria. The interviewer was one of our students and authors of this contribution (female, White and in her mid-twenties), who conducted the interview in the course of an introductory seminar on qualitative methods. The interviewees were invited to take part in a study on their stories and everyday lives against the backdrop of various social debates about gender. The interviewer got in touch with Jane and Mike via snowball sampling. The interview lasted about an hour and was conducted in a private setting. Senior research fellows of the project team developed the informed consent according to data privacy standards, which was presented to the interviewees prior to the start of the interview by the interviewer. The university’s ethical board approved the consent files.

The interviewees had recently got engaged and bought an apartment. Both have a steady job and are economically well-situated. Jane works for a TV station and Mike works in air traffic. His job is better paid but Jane’s job offers better career prospects. Jane also has a social media profile via which she blogs semi-professionally. Mike takes her pictures from time to time and has his own account, but only for private purposes. We consider both Jane and Mike as social actors who are explicitly interpellated by pop cultural narratives: Not only do they regularly consume social media, they also frequently engage in social media by posting themselves.

Within the course of the interview, both position their relationship within an egalitarian relationship model. To the question of how both stand on gender issues, e.g. equality, Mike responds: “So I think everyone should have equal rights, of course, and within a relationship (.) it should be; it’s always a question

of balance I just think it should be balanced;” and Jane a few lines later continues: “Yes, don’t keep tally lists of who does what and how often, so there are also phases (.) when he works especially hard and then maybe I do a bit more and then I work especially hard again and then maybe he does a bit more again for a few days; so that’s just also; you mustn’t be such a bean counter”.

We now chronologically present our analysis of the interview, starting from the beginning of the interview and continuing with relevant statements of the interview that can show rhetorical patterns that provide insights into how they construct their “we” and the ways gender inequalities are masked by doing so.

The romantic narrative: The male man and the female woman

Already at the beginning of the interview it becomes apparent that the interviewees develop their couple’s story together, proposing a romantic narrative. After being asked about the story of their relationship, they start by narrating how they first met³:

- 1 Jane: well (.) we’ve met in [a ski-resort] (.) at the: ski-opening-concert of [a band] (.) and I
 2 was there with my girl-friends (3) and you should tell your part of the story;
 3 Mike: @(..)@ I was there with my friends well () both of us didn’t () both did (.) we
 4 nearly didn’t go there but still happened to be there by a happy coincidence a:nd (.) then we
 5 met by chance and got into talking and I am from [a city] and she is from near [another city]
 6 and well, so,
 7 Jane: □ and
 8 Mike: □ we both drove home and,
 9 Jane: □ but ehm the funny part was that e:hm (.)
 10 that w- we just hit it off right away a:nd w- we were talking so much and were together all the
 11 time and I was even @sitting on his shoulders@ and e:hm (.) then he gave me his number but
 12 his battery was low; (.) e:hm so this is why we coul- couldn’t really () communicate via
 13 Facebook or anything else so he just gave me his number and then we’ve somehow we got
 14 into texting the other days a:nd (.) then after one month °I think it was°;
 15 Mike: three weeks or so;
 16 Jane: he came to [my city];
 17 Mike: again with my friends
 18 Jane: □ ehm
 19 Mike: □ so we had a night out and met her (.) gang; then they came to
 20 [my city] again and well this is how it came
 21 Jane: □ so on- well three weeks later
 22 they again came to [my city] exactly and this well th- the starting gun has been fired for our
 23 relationship

On the level of content, we can observe that the interviewees talk about the process of getting to know each other as something that happened “by chance”, i.e., as beyond their control. By referring to the coincidental conditions of getting to know each other, they introduce chance as an important force in their romantic relationship. When interpreting *how* they elaborate this content, we can see that they co-develop the narrative, they naturally take turns, and when they interrupt

each other, they do so to complete each other's sentences. When Mike provides too little detail (line 15), Jane elaborates the “funny part” that emphasises the romantic character of “hitting it off right away” as she “was even @sitting on his shoulders@”. The interviewees then further develop their talk in the first person plural, constructing a “we”.

In this first sequence, the couple's story is presented as a narrative of romantic togetherness characterised by sharing the same orientation of gradually becoming a ‘we’ (from a long-distance relationship to settling down together). It is interesting to note at this point that the interviewees talk about their decisions (buying a house, getting a dog) but do not reveal anything about the decision-making processes (should we buy an apartment, should we get a dog?). Their togetherness thus appears as a given and not up for discussion. Even if both are in favour of an egalitarian relationship model, certain – traditional – aspects of their choices (getting engaged, buying property, settling down as a family) do not become an object in question, as there seems to be no need for further negotiation or explanation.

McRobbie (2020, p. 49) would talk about perfectionism at this point:

The perfect extols a vision of life that foregrounds an array of well-groomed bodies, beautiful spaces, tasteful things and exciting identities, which indicate a sense of belonging within a comfortable family and consumer-oriented milieu. The idea of the perfect hinges on a fantasy of middle-class futurity

The “comfortable family and consumer-oriented milieu” (McRobbie, 2020, p. 49) - moving in together, buying a house, getting a dog in Jane's and Mike's case - is not explicitly negotiated by the couple, possibly precisely because it serves a psychological concept. Thus, the form of perfectionism described by McRobbie is performed in the couple's everyday narrative.

In a similar way, also their gendered positions do not come up as subjects of negotiation but as facts. As part of this presentation, their ‘togetherness’ is strengthened by the fact that both have developed distinct roles in their relationship:

- 1 Mike: Well, I'm the planner
- 2 Jane: @(.)@ he is the planner (.) right and I (.) live in the moment @to put it nicely@
- 3 Mike: □@(.)@

A few lines later (247-255), Jane states: “@right@ (2) no but he's very e:hm (.) he thinks strategically and I:: (.) thi:nk e:hm (.) very @emotional@ (.) and very” and Mike completes her sentence:

yes I have; th- th- you can actually see this in our jobs; I am ha- w- well as a [job] I have to plan much ahead (.) and actually have to think pretty structured and (.) and logically and that also suited me in school (.) maths and stuff; and [Jane] was always a bit more of the language type which you can also see in her (.) job and she is a bit more eh bit temperamental than me; I am a bit more quiet and sh- Jane is temperament- the more temperamental person of the two of us

Jane and Mike develop this rather traditional gender dichotomy – her being “emotional” and him being more “rational” – without explicitly reflecting on this stereotypic binary. Their romantic narrative is secured by the traditional ‘opposites attract’ metaphor. As we have already shown, Gill (2007) suggests that assuming a character difference between men and women serves to maintain sexiness while at the same time this narrative of difference is being dusted off from an ‘old’ biological essentialism. It is no longer biological characteristics that make the difference, but psychological character traits and these secure that men are still men, and women still women (Gill, 2007, p. 159). Regarding our interview, we can see that there is agreement between the two: There should be balance and equality. But at the same time everyday psychological knowledge about character traits (this is his or her personality) legitimises why they would still behave gender stereotypically and why this is no problem. Since their behavioural patterns are conceptualised as personality traits, this is not something they have to critically deal with. Personality is not something changeable but stable, it enables the ‘opposites attract’ narrative and thus becomes a strategy to legitimise their rather orthodox position by referring to psychological knowledge about personality traits.

However, when paying close attention to the ways in which they develop this theme, we can see that these elaborations are shot through with tensions on a more tacit level: In this sequence, Jane laughs a lot, especially when calling herself “very @emotional@” and Mike often stops while talking, repeats words or does not finish them. In the way in which a stereotypical gender positioning is discussed, the laughter teases and thus gently ironizes this position; his attempt to correct himself again and again, to stop himself, and to start again also indicates that it is not easy for him to unfold his elaboration uncritically in this context.

Conditions of visibility: Jane as working girl

After the sequence interpreted above, Jane and Mike come to a preliminary close of their couple-story. In a short meta-communication, they ask the interviewer what else she wants to inquire about, to which the interviewer answers “everything about your relationship”. Subsequently, Jane and Mike address gender, commenting that their gender roles are actually inverted:

- 1 Jane: (4) well maybe what is also quite important is () maybe what is also important to say
- 2 is that ehm that at home it is (.) he cooks (4) e:hm a:nd @(.)@
- 3 Mike: I would from time to time I would even say that for our case the roles are even a bit;
- 4 these classic roles are almost almost reversed; ((breaths in deeply)) because you (.) are a bit
- 5 more (.) career-driven; so you can do your thing and I support that (.) and for me it is well (.) I
- 6 have this great amazing job and stuff but this job is well this job is a very safe job and I I (.)
- 7 you don’t have this (.) in my position you don’t have this (.) you hard- actually don’t have
- 8 these promotion prospects well there are a few that do some kind of office jobs in other jobs
- 9 or (.) someone will be the boss at some point but m- 99 per cent of us don’t really have these;
- 10 (.) strive to the top; and for me it is this work-life-balance thing and and I am then (.) in this
- 11 gender role almost more the classical woman th- that I cook and ra- rather (.) do a little (.)

- 12 something at home and Jane who is the this career girl
 13 Jane: mhm (4) yes its true; I mean well I hardly ever cook but on the other hand I clean the
 14 bathroom //@(.)@// that's how it is- I always told him that ehm; (.) he can (.) if; he enjoys
 15 cooking- I don't enjoy cooking but I love cleaning the bathroom; that's fun; I like doing that
 16 @(.)@ but that's just; it's not that I don't do anything in the household

While Jane's (male) role is framed as intrinsically motivated, his 'female' role is presented as the result of external factors. Jane agrees but adds that she also does housework, for instance cleaning the bathroom (line 302-303). At this point, there is also an intersection with pleasure (respectively task-enjoyment) that reveals a neoliberal argumentation pattern (self-fulfilment, enjoying the work one does). While the traditional heteronormative romantic narrative occurs almost quasi-naturally, their 'non-traditional' exchange of gender roles is in need of explicit justification; it is determined, on the one hand, by individual character (she has a stronger career-drive) and, on the other hand, by external limitations (safe job without promotion possibility vs. unsecure job situation with the necessity of investing a lot). Interestingly, everyday psychological references occur here again: On the one hand, the concept of self-realisation or self-expression is used. It is about being able to realise oneself in the household and its activities, to be able to do something that one really likes, that fulfils one ("I always told him that ehm; (.) he can (.) if; he enjoys cooking- I don't enjoy cooking but I love cleaning the bathroom"). On the other hand, we see a reference to the concept of "work-life balance" for describing and legitimising their role reversal. By recourse to psychological concepts, the need to legitimise changed gender roles is de-thematised: It seems natural to justify 'inverted' roles psychologically.

In the subsequent part of the transcript, the two talk about how they manage their everyday relationship life: They elaborate that Mike keeps track of important 'dates' Jane often fails to remember since she is mainly focussed on her career. They stress that their roles are in this respect "completely different" from how their parents – one generation earlier – 'do' their couple life. However, Jane notes afterwards: "It's just generally very mixed with us, because in other aspects it's not like that" (line 340-341). Jane represents the 'female' role on the personality level, which is described by the example of her emotional reactions, while Mike performs the 'male' role, as he is presented as a rational thinker. Mike's positioning as 'feminine', on the other hand, is based on his household activities and not on his personal traits. Therefore, the tentative inversion of roles is mainly reflected in terms of the gendered division of work (job, household); while on the personality level, they both ascribe gender-conforming attributes to themselves and each other:

- 1 Jane: but right that; that with me this; I have this feminine part and he has this masculine
 2 part in the relationship like as a person; its only in he does a little more in the household and I
 3 am more career oriented but we also see it for example with friends that; u:hm that it () is
 4 actually not so self-evident that the man does everything in the household because (.) women
 5 Mike: or does anything at all @(.)@
 6 Jane: or does anything at all @yeah@ °true° so that has somehow not yet gotten through to
 7 everyone; so with friends of ours, for example, she studies; two courses of study and works

8 and cooks but and cleans and does everything and he works has a secure job and (.) actually
 9 does nothing (.) so there's still that and that's just with us whenever we're with them we find
 10 that quite terrifying somehow; because (1) u:hm; I mean he also cooks and I often don't help
 11 him in the kitchen because firstly the kitchen is small and secondly he's much faster without
 12 me @(.)@ but then somehow I clean up or so; and when we are at their place for example and
 13 she says yes? clear the table or uhm do the dishes; that he then still sits in front of the
 14 computer and plays; or sits in front of the play station and plays so; [...]so in our relationship
 15 it's also the case that (.) both have the say-so (.)

This passage shows Jane's and Mike's egalitarian relationship model whereby their friends serve as markers of distinction and comparison. In contrast to their friends and to "everyone", in Jane's and Mike's relationship, "both have the say-so" (line 371).

A few lines later, they talk about their decision-making. Jane keeps on saying that it is balanced in their relationship ("in some situations he lets me decide because he knows I make the good decisions; so it's not that what he says is what we do or what I say is what we do, but it's just very (.) very (.) balanced;"; lines 379-382). Mike however subsequently stresses "I mean I'm often very (.) convinced that my @decisions are the best@" (lines 383-384). Again, this is accompanied by laughing that shows a form of teasing each other on that topic, a subtle way of also teasing his rather orthodox gender position. What is important though, is that Jane emphasises that Mike's conviction in being right has nothing to do with gender:

but that has nothing to do with you believing that as a man you are worth more or that you believe that your opinion is worth more but you are generally a bit know-it-all; but that has nothing to do with your gender @(.)@ so that yes? you're just like that (3) that's just one of your traits. (line 388-391)

Therefore, a possible imbalance in decision-making is not attributed to a gender issues but explained by personal characteristics. Mike's know-it-all nature is a character trait "that has nothing to do with your gender" (lines 390-391). A traditional gender-position is circumvented by an individualisation and gender stereotypical behaviour is legitimised by individual character *traits* that are considered immutable and not subject to volition or choice. By contrast, their professional activities, where choice explicitly functions to bring their 'modernity' to the fore (she is the "career girl" who can 'do her thing'), give the impression of "mixing" (line 346) roles.

Ambivalences also become apparent when the couple talks about posting on social media:

1 Mike: and then it got to the point where I suggested that hey let's take a picture here and
 2 there and; so [Jane] is the one who is perfect in front of the camera (1)

3 Jane: □ @(.)@

4 Mike: □ and I can
 5 take good pictures; the other way around I often (.) didn't like it so much in front of the
 6 camera, so except for this typical laughing photo haha super here? (.) ahm and [Jane] (1) I
 7 don't want to say that she does it @bad@

8 Jane: □ @ (2) @ @gosh@

9 Mike: □ @(.)@ you can

- 10 do it too but if I just I am quite convinced of my photography skills
 11 Jane: **yes of course** but you took this course
 12 Mike: □yes yes
 13 Jane: □and I didn't take this course; but I think that I
 14 can
 15 Mike: □and when I say hey and when I say then hey try that ()
 16 Jane: □considering that I didn't take this course I think I can take nice pictures
 17 and I can edit them well
 18 Mike: □@(.)@ yes in the meanwhile you can do it you can do it well
 19 Jane: because you showed it to me yes; that's just the way it is he did the course and I didn't
 20 do it although he said he did the course do the course
 21 Mike: □exactly I have said 15 times
 22 hey look do this the course too ()
 23 Jane: I didn't want to do it; e:hm but he; so I can edit the pictures well now because he
 24 showed it to me, so that's something, too (.) he just showed it to me and I find that much nicer
 25 than sitting in front of the computer and looking at it, I think it's nice when you just °show° it
 26 to me.
 27 Mike: in any case the roles are just (.) well assigned; (.) me behind the camera you in front
 28 Jane: yes; so he is the typical Instahubby

Here, Mike's important role for Jane's social media representation becomes explicit. Jane shifts from position where she tries to insist that she could very well take over Mike's tasks and edit her pictures alone, to a position where she emphasises that she owes her skills to him. In this transcript excerpt, it becomes apparent that Mike feels that Jane's social media representation is successful because of him, and Jane encourages this view. The division of roles and work regarding the representation and posting is traditional ("Jane is perfect in front of the camera" and Mike "behind the camera"), and Jane even calls him a "typical Instahubby⁴". His dominant position of being the one who has 'the' photography skills is followed by teasing each other (when he criticises her photography skills both laugh and Jane mucks about it – "gosh" – but laughs at the same time).

Afterwards they elaborate on the effects of Instagram on their daily lives and stress the importance of "Instagram-free time" (e.g. lines 591-592). They drift off the theme of posting on Instagram, reflect upon how they are influenced by media, and talk about turning off the TV more often, to have more time for each other. They then get back to the topic of posting about their private lives again and touch upon how Jane and Mike select the extracts of reality that Jane posts on her professional account. At this point, Mike's dominant position comes to the fore more directly, as her visibility happens on his terms. Mike states:

but (.) apart from that (1) yes you sh- you post the things you edit the pictures; she often asks me if the picture is nice; so she almost always asks me for my opinion; (.) with pictures and also with the texts (.) I just look over it; as proofreading in a way ehm (lines 665-668)

This is where his interpretational sovereignty comes into play and where her *luminosity* (as McRobbie (2009) puts it) is framed by his (male) action – she adorns the picture; he makes a decision about her representation. Overall, this is a sequence in the transcript in which their seemingly egalitarian relationship is riddled with tension: on the one hand, it is his authority with which he signs off which pictures she should post on Instagram. On the other hand, this also puts

Jane in the stereotypical position of being better off as a woman in front of the camera overall. That there is something not quite right about it – and that the two of them at least sense this – becomes explicit in the fact that these sequences are accompanied by a mutual, subtle laughing, teasing each other.

Gender (in)equality conflicts in the relationship: Between theory and practice

In the further course of the interview, the interviewer first asks about conflicts and then how Jane and Mike position themselves to gender issues. In their answers, they depict their conflict management as rational and functional, mentioning only minor conflicts (“peanuts”, line 755) that they were able to solve within one day. Regarding their position on gender issues they problematise the power of language: On the one hand, they agree that it was important to represent women via language practice, on the other hand they criticise gender stereotypic attributions Jane has encountered in her professional practice. Generally, both agree that “everyone should love whom they want” (line 803). However, while they agree on gender-equality on a content level, ambivalences become evident when it comes to practice: In an interview extract in the last part of the interview, they are explicitly asked about their views on “equality” (line 923). After reflecting on the fact that this is more a “matter of opinion what makes one happy” and that there should not be any “tally charts” within a relationship, Mike talks about his difficulties in everyday practice:

- 1 Mike: tha- that's still difficult because every now and then that happens to me, too; that I; (.)
- 2 I'm at work all day for 11 hours and then I ((coughs slightly)) come home shortly before or
- 3 I'm on the way home and think well great now I was at work for 11 hours I hope there is at
- 4 least something to eat at home because I'm hungry (.) and then I come home and then of
- 5 course (1) which is ok; then there were days when [Jane] was maybe (2) super unproductive
- 6 and she says she complains about herself I didn't do anything today was only in front of the
- 7 TV and on the cell and yes I am totally dissatisfied; and I just come home and see nothing no
- 8 loaded dishwasher no laundry washed no (.) no cleaning or something and no food; I think
- 9 perfect if I'd been home for 11 hours I would have done all that and I am still hungry and then
- 10 ((coughs slightly)) I am dissatisfied for myself (.) and then often don't say that well great
- 11 either I provoke an argument and say why didn't you do these things or I did; she notices that
- 12 I am dissatisfied so it's just (2) it always depends on the attitude with which one approaches
- 13 the whole thing
- 14 Jane: yes, and to come back to equality on a larger scale now, not in a relationship I just
- 15 think it's extremely important that women not only have the same opinion () that they have
- 16 the same value as men (...)

Attending to the way in which he begins his narration, we can see that he is referring to his own relationship experience. Realising gender equality in practice seems difficult to him, because 'it' happens to him, too. Mike is sometimes "dissatisfied" with Jane 'doing her thing' when she is not productive while he seems to engage in both: the domestic and the sphere of gainful employment. It is interesting at this point that we do not know whether he is talking about a regular workday, Jane is not spending productively, or whether he talks about a day where he works, but she does not (e.g. at the weekend). Her non-productivity affects him and involves him emotionally, as he directly articulates his dissatisfaction repeatedly. Mike's narrative opens up the possibility of moving their discussion on gender equality from abstract general reflections to sharing concrete relationship experiences. However, Jane does not take up his experience by relating her side of the story but continues with a more general reflection; regarding the mode of discourse there is a divergence with Jane's turn-taking and switch to "equality on a larger scale".

We can see here a rhetorical pattern that seems to regulate a tension shooting through their ostensibly egalitarian model: Although Jane and Mike agree on gender equality on a reflexive opinion level, in practice Mike is dissatisfied when she does not cook while he works. At this point, Jane's moving away from experience to a reflexive level can be interpreted as one mode of dealing with this discrepancy that allows for agreement, as she shifts to the more general opinion level again, away from difficult practice.

Tension shooting through egalitarian practice: An outlook

Drawing on a case study of a heterosexual couple talking about their relationship, we have shown that the couple enacts theoretical consensus regarding gender-equality while on the level of practice their ostensibly egalitarian relationship model is shot through with tensions and thus becomes more ambivalent:

Jane Mike position their relationship model as modern, respectively egalitarian. By arguing that there are inverted gender roles: while she engages more strongly in paid work, he invests more in the private sphere by cooking the meals. By pointing explicitly to this inversion of roles, the couple indicates their modernity in respect to gender roles. The couple frames this shift of roles as the result of choice (for her) and external conditions (for him). Furthermore, their shifting of gender roles predominantly seems acceptable for a specific area; when it comes to describing their personalities, they adhere to rather traditional images: he is portrayed as rational, while she is pictured as emotional. At this point, we see the first strategy of de-thematisation that they use: It is everyday psychological knowledge that allows them to avoid critical discussion or negotiation of their own entanglement in rather orthodox roles. On the one hand, they reassure themselves about concepts such as self-realisation (this task is no fun for me, but it is for him), if they do not conform to the corresponding gender role. On the other hand, where they perform more orthodox roles, they legitimise

them with another psychological concept: it is their personality and thus, it cannot be changed. Psychological concepts – as Gill (2007) also suggests – are involved in de-thematising something potentially conflict-laden in relation to gender inequality. Therefore, even though the couple's reference to psychological concepts in a specific area of everyday life secures their supposedly egalitarian way of living it at the same time allows masking the traditional distribution of roles in other areas. This also produces tensions as can be seen in the fact that both ironise these self-descriptions, tease each other when it comes to rather orthodox gender position they find themselves in.

As a second strategy of de-thematisation we identified a specific reflexive modus: When referring to situations in which their practice diverges from their shared ideal of gender equality and inverted roles, they switch from telling concrete stories about their lives (e.g., when the male part feels offended by the female doing too little in the household) to negotiating their ideals (gender-equality should exist on general societal level). Referring back to abstract ideal levels this conflict in an intellectual way, nevertheless leaves the practice untouched. This strategy of de-thematisation is also discussed by Wetterer (2003). Wetterer does not directly analyse empirical data but rather reviews existing sociological studies in terms of what they reveal about gender discourses in general. She posits that

The disappearance of inequality from discourses that revolve around equality and self-realisation, the insistence that it is not normative gender standards and traditional models but one's own decisions that determine one's actions, obscures essential aspects of social reality. The de-thematisation of inequality between the sexes and increasingly also between women does not eliminate inequalities from the world but removes and protects them from criticism and in this way indirectly contributes to their persistence in practice.⁵ (Wetterer, 2003, pp. 89-90)

Our data shows that Jane in the sequence presented above (lines 939-955) does not only diverge from the topic of relationship practice that seems shot through with tensions but also does Mike highlight at the end of his statement that it “depends on the attitude with which one approaches the whole thing”. So it becomes – like Wetterer suggests – an individual problem that could be thought away by means of individual attitudes. This rhetorical pattern allows us to better understand the function and the problem of McRobbie's (2009) double entanglement. Affirming equality on levels of content – in the presented case – appears like a truce. A truce, however, indicates that there is a form of conflict underneath, i.e., that the language of gender equality is used to understand their relationship in ways that enable and/or mask gender inequality on levels of their practice. We thus consider it especially important to draw attention to the “subtle ways” (McRobbie, 2009, p. 46) that everyday psychological knowledge plays in reassuring individuals tacitly to reproduce gender-inequality and structures of patriarchy in the heterosexual relationship-practice.

Endnotes

¹ The term postfeminism has a double meaning: On the one hand, it refers to the empirical phenomenon of postfeminism (e.g. repudiating feminism, while at the same time assuming that gender equality is an important value of ‘modern’ societies) and on the other hand, it refers to the critique that tries to unmask postfeminism as ideology.

² All names, jobs, and locations do not reveal real names but have been pseudonymised by the authors. The interviews were originally conducted and analysed in German and were translated to English by the authors of this article.

³ The excerpts were transcribed by the Talk in Qualitative Social Research (TiQ) transcript-system. This is a guide to the used symbols (Przyborski & Wohlrab-Sahr, 2014, p. 167):

[name]	pseudonymised content
(.)	short pause
()	incomprehensible words
(2)	two second pause
□	direct turn-taking
@(.)@	shortly laughing
@funny@	a word said while laughing
Funny	loud
<u>Funny</u>	emphasised
Fu-	broken off
Funny;	slightly sinking intonation
Funny?	strongly rising intonation
°funny°	low voice
Fu::nny	stretched word

⁴ Abbreviation for Instagram husband („The husband of a blogger or online influencer who takes photographs for his spouse and is tolerant of the constant interruptions that come along with the blogging business”, see <https://www.urbandictionary.com/define.php?term=instagram%20husband>)

⁵ Wetterer’s text is originally in German and was translated to English by the authors of this article.

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Psychology as an oppressive tool during the ‘Woman, Life, Freedom’ uprising in Iran

Laya Hooshyari

Abstract

The Woman, Life, Freedom (WLF) uprising in Iran like other social movements has its own narrations of the people’s courage and resistance versus the brutality and oppression of the regime, i.e. the Islamic Republic of Iran (IRI). In this article, I try to show only one part of this brutality by the hand of psychology. In this article, I am trying to talk about four parts: Firstly, I discuss the psychological oppressions inflicted by the IRI regime since the beginning of the WLF uprising. Secondly, I address the relationship between the Iranian psychologist community and this uprising, highlighting three different groups: 1) Advocates of oppression, 2) The pragmatic reformists, 3) The activist minority. Moreover, I explore how psychology discourse, in general, has a direct or indirect relationship with the oppression of social movements and how we can go beyond that by creating an organic link with neighbourhood committees in Iran.

Keywords

Iran, neighbourhood committees, protests, psychological oppression, social movements, Woman, Life, Freedom uprising

Introduction

The Woman, Life, Freedom uprising is tied with the name of Jina (Mahsa) Amini who was arrested, beaten, and killed by Guidance Patrol due to wearing an inappropriate hijab in September 2022 in Iran (Hooshyari, Öztürk, Goikoetxea, 2022). This uprising started with a protest gathering in front of the hospital where she died in Tehran and spread from Jina's hometown of Saqqez to all 31 provinces of Iran in the following days. Protesters abroad also held rallies in more than 150 cities around the world.

From the first days of uprising, like other similar past movements, the IRI authorities severely suppressed all the widespread demonstrations and all the

activities of protesters. Several hundred people were killed, and several thousand people were arrested and imprisoned. These clashes were more deadly in Sistan, Baluchestan, and Kurdish regions, than in other regions of Iran.

Apart from physical violence the significant part of the oppressions were related to psychological oppressions. In this article, I will look at an essential aspect of the regime's repressive face: the psychological oppression inflicted on people, particularly women, during the Women, Life, Freedom uprising. It does not mean that only during this uprising IRI used psychology as an oppressive tool, but in this uprising the amount and timing of usage was completely more than past. This article uses the recent Iranian experience as a case study in how social movements generally might experience psychological oppression.

I am trying to show not only some concerted examples of IRI psychological oppressions of people (like stigmatizing people by mental illness), but also I am trying to show both the direct connections of some psychological communities with IRI in suppressing people *and* the indirect collaborations of psychologist with the regime. By “direct connections” I am referring to some statements published by some groups which encouraged IRI forces to suppress people and severely punish the protesters, or those psychologists who eagerly joined in the psychological tortures of people in prisons, schools, and hospitals. By “indirect connections” I am referring to mainstream psychologists who although are against the IRI regime but whose actions will not create revolutionary movements and will not change anything, but will only lead to conforming activities. These activities refer to efforts that promote adaptation to the current situation or, at the very least, aim for a smooth and gradual change instead of dismantling all the regulations of the existing subversive structures. Basically, some psychologists do not engage in fundamental changes and prioritizes gradual individual changes over radical economic and political changes, since for many psychologists the individual mind is at the centre of ‘change’. Moreover, I want to highlight minority psychologists and psychology students who have the potential to move beyond traditional psychology discourse while maintaining the radical elements of protest. By taking inspiration from neighbourhood committees in Iran I am outlining the first steps of a psychology that can have a revolutionary essence to change the current situation.

1. Psychological oppressions of the Islamic Republic regime

Portrayal of government killings as suicides

Perhaps one of the most significant psychological oppressions of the IRI is the portrayal of government killings as suicides, both in detention centres and on the streets. IRI authorities tried to indicate that the victims had taken their own lives due to their personal issues and the mental illnesses they were allegedly suffering from. They continuously pressured families to confess that their loved ones had a mental illness.

One of those people was Nika Shakarami, a 16-year-old girl who went missing in Tehran during the first days of the uprising. According to her aunt, her family received news of her death ten days later (Shakarami, 2022). The online News outlet Mizan, affiliated with Iran's judiciary, published a report asserting that Nika had died by suicide, citing a Tehran prosecutor (Mizanonline, 2022). However, there is a video of her standing on top of an overturned garbage bin, waving her headscarf as it is engulfed by flames, amid chants of death to the dictator, that showed she was very active during the uprising. Moreover a death certificate initially obtained by BBC Persian and verified by CNN reveals that Shakarami died from multiple injuries caused by blows with a blunt object (CNN, 2022).

Rape and sexual harassments

Apart from verbal and physical violence, sexual violence has been one of the oldest tools of the IRI regime to exert pressure on women and mostly used to degrade, torture, and exert power (McGlynn, 2011). In several accounts recorded in the book "White Torture," there are explicit references to the interrogators' attempts to sexually abuse female prisoners (Mohammadi, 2020). These forms of violence often remain silent due to societal taboos, and unfortunately, society tends to avoid discussing the root causes of this gender-based violence and its consequences (Aghtaie, 2017).

CNN, after a two-month investigation (October and November 2022), confirmed in a comprehensive report that detained boys and girls in Iran are subjected to sexual violence, and in some cases, rape occurs in prisons. The physical assault and sexual harassment of female prisoners, especially those seen as "beautiful", are more severe. CNN, citing informed sources who have interviewed the victims, reported that IRI agents have filmed scenes of sexual violence and used those films as a tool for extortion from the protesters or to silence them (CNN, 2022). One of the individuals who has been subjected to sexual abuse and even physical injury multiple times is A.A. In the "disclosed conversation," doctors have expressed horror upon seeing signs of abuse on A.A (Iranwire, 2022). Furthermore, according to the report from the Councils of Student Associations of the Country, Soha Mortezaei, an active student, was subjected to beating, assault, and sexual harassment during her arrest (HRANA, 2022). According to a feminist activist in Iran at least three women were expelled from their homes and forced to leave their families because they thought the women were raped in prison and therefore no longer have any place in the home.

Distribution of psychiatric medications among the prisoners

Vida Rabani, a jailed journalist, published an open letter expressing her objection to the disclosure of her private medical information by Mizan News Agency on 26th of May 2023. Mizan is affiliated to IRI and stated: "Vida Rabani has a

history of using neurologic and psychiatric medications and has been examined by a specialist neurologist and psychiatrist in Evin Prison" (Mizan, 2022). In a section of the letter, she writes, "You have detained me in my own home four times in four years, to the point where every doorbell makes me jump. You know that detention, solitary confinement, uncertainty, and unawareness are forms of torture that are both damaging and invisible." She also mentioned in another part of the letter, "I am not ashamed to say that my mental state is affected, and I take anxiety and depression medications. It is not shameful." She also said: "I wish at least psychiatric and psychological associations would protest disregarding their professional protocols... What happens if a patient in a treatment room can no longer speak up about everything?" (Shargh, 2022). She also said: "Inside Gharchak Prison, officials said they would provide Band 8 prisoners (detainees of the WLF Uprising) with as much sedatives and tranquilizers as they wanted. Oxide, Clonazepam, Tranqopin, and others were distributed easily. At first, I could not believe that they would give you as many as you asked for. They referred to the medications as the 'Trolley of Happiness!' One night, I became concerned about the condition of some girls. I tested it myself and asked the nurse at Gharchak to please give me two Clonazepam pills, and they gave them to me! Right there, I returned the pills and expressed my objection to this situation" (BBC, 2022). By stating that the prison officials did not consider the pressures endured by the detainees, she described the detention centre as a "method of exerting pressure and torturing the accused." She highlighted the "trauma, anxiety, and fear" experienced by the detainees and referred to the suicide of detainees after release from prison. Some previous prisoners confirmed these issues. Mona Maafei, a detained psychologist and social activist, Zahra Kashkaki, a detained student, and Nasim Soltanbeigi, a detained journalist, have shared their conditions in prison and the easy distribution of drugs in prison. One of them told: "few days before they took me in front of the camera for forced confession, they had discontinued my medications and replaced my regular pill with a stronger one ... with the discontinuation of one of my pills, I had reached a point where I felt trapped and contemplated suicide" (Ibid).

Before her, Sepideh Farhan a previous political prisoner who sadly chose to end her life on 11th July 2023, stated in an interview with Radio Zamaneh that: "The prison is a bleak place where inmates lose their human identity... during my detention at the Ministry of Intelligence's detention centre, they give me 9 pills every day for 10 days. Later, when I investigated, I found out that these pills were addiction withdrawal pills specifically for those with severe addiction to morphine" (Radio Zamaneh, 2021).

Sending students to counselling centres and opening psychiatric and psychological files

During the WLF uprising, primary school and high school students actively participated in these protests, demanding their basic human rights (Jay et al, 2022). An unpublished study conducted in 20 girls' schools in Fars province

revealed that, apart from offices, school counselling rooms were used as places for interrogation and psychological torture. Various tactics have been employed to harass students. Constant humiliation and criticism of girls by school counsellors, and in some cases by intelligence forces and the Basij¹, saying, "You receive money from foreign media and Ms. X., how much money did you get?"

In some cases, students were sent to counselling and psychological centres in the Ministry of Education and the Correction and Rehabilitation Organisation to establish counselling and psychological files. In a state media interview, the Minister of Education in Iran mentioned that "school-age students who were arrested during the protests were being sent to psychological centres, claiming that it was done to reform them as they might have become anti-social individuals" (CNN, 2022).

Forced sending to mental hospitals & psychological clinics

Forced sending to mental hospitals has been one of the oppressions of the IRI. Behnam Mahjoubi, a member of the Sufi Gonabadi order who was jailed because of a 2018 protest by a religious sect, perished after authorities failed to care for his medical condition in a mental hospital in Tehran. He rightly pointed out: "we are witnessing the decline of humanity in these centres" (VOA, 2018). In recent years, several political prisoners in Iran have been forcibly hospitalized in mental hospitals. They said that during this period, they were injected with drugs that sometimes caused them to have trouble moving or speaking, and some of them were treated with electric shocks (BBC, 2021). Melika Gharagozlu, a journalism student and one of the protestors of compulsory hijab, was among the people who were forcibly sent to a psychiatric hospital during the WLF uprising.

Forced referrals to psychological clinics also occurred prior to the WLF uprising, but I was unable to find information on prisoners from this time. Banafsheh Jamali was sentenced to participate in the therapy sessions of the Mawa counseling center located in Qom city to "learn the methods of controlling emotions and calmness". The Maawa Counseling Center is affiliated with the Imam Khomeini Educational and Research Institute, where "divisional counsellors" provide psychological counselling in various fields. This centre is also engaged in the production of psychological products with an "Islamic approach" (Bidarzani, 2023).

Naming the biological terror of students: The collective hysteria

The chain poisoning in girls' schools in Iran began in November 2022, and it appears that a "mostly inhalation-stimulating substance" has been the cause of poisoning among the students. (Scientific Committee of the Ministry of Health). Typically, students have reported the throwing of an object into the classroom or schoolyard that releases gas, resulting in symptoms such as fatigue, throat

¹ One of the five forces of the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC).

irritation, dizziness, nausea, and headaches. Since then, more than 5000 students in 25 provinces and approximately 230 schools have been affected by this incident (Shargh, 2023). The exact cause of this event is unknown, and there are debates about this issue. The cabinet ministers and officials each give information that the other official rejects. For example, Iran's deputy health minister said: "some people wanted to close all schools, especially girls' schools", but he denied these statements a day later. Gholamreza Jalali, an official in IRGC, called the issue of poisonings real, but said that: "now Iran's schools are caught in a phenomenon called social fear" (Eghtesad News, 2023). Majid Mohebi, vice president of Qom University of Medical Sciences, denied the poisoning of these students and said: "Most of us feel that the emotions of the students and the environment have been transferred to these students and they are suffering from anxiety. They think they have some problem, so they go to the hospital (Isna, 2023). In the meantime, people who support the Axis of Resistance, the anti-Western, anti-Israeli, and anti-Saudi political and informal military alliance between Iran, militant groups in Palestine, the Syrian Government, and the Lebanese called these series of poisonings "mass hysteria" (Fars News, 2023). A BBC World² report about this chemical attack is a resource for them because they mentioned, in a long report, that mass hysteria as a reason of these bodily reactions (Iranwire, 2023).

Labelling women with mental disorders is not a recent phenomenon. Throughout history, hysteria has served as a tool to suppress courageous women (Harris, 2011). For centuries, the term "hysteria" has been actively employed to dismiss and confine women within the oppressive confines created by patriarchal systems (Amin, 2022). It has been a means of demonizing women, subjecting them to persecution, and fabricating false mental illnesses like "hysteria." Hysteria is just one of the many ways femininities has been pathologized to enforce conformity to imposed gender norms. The exploitation of women's bodies to exert power remains prevalent today, whether through the pink tax, sexual violence, or restrictions on abortion rights (Thelandersson, 2022).

In general, there was a recurring emphasis on mental issues and linking the protests to psychological issues (psychologizing) by the media and officials of the Islamic Republic. IRI authorities in collaboration with the Psychological and Counselling Organisation (PCO), claimed that psychological factors had caused the start of the protests, they argued, "Due to the three difficult years of the COVID-19 pandemic, society has been confronted with an eruption of anger, and we are witnessing its emergence on the streets. Therefore, we should consider the happiness, social enjoyment, energy release, and emotions of individuals in society..." (Arman News, 2023).

One might ponder whether the gruesome actions I've detailed fall within the realm of the Islamic Republic of Iran's propaganda. Why, then, am I characterizing them as psychological tactics of oppression? While I fully concur that these actions indeed serve as part of the Iranian government's propaganda, it is essential to recognize that the field of psychology itself can wield its own oppressive language, potentially functioning as a tool of oppression in its own

² BBC World, a few days deleted the article and apologised.

right. Expanding on this idea, psychology, as a discipline, is not immune to misuse or manipulation. It possesses the potential to employ language and concepts that can inadvertently perpetuate oppression. I'm emphasizing that while every scientific discipline and philosophy can potentially contribute to oppression, in the case of the IRI, psychology appears to have played a more prominent role in facilitating oppression compared to other fields of study. This viewpoint underscores the idea that psychology possesses a unique capacity to be harnessed as a potent tool for control and manipulation. This stems from its ability to shape public opinion, influence societal norms, and provide a framework for justifying specific actions or policies. Furthermore, psychology's insights into human behavior make it particularly influential in the hands of those seeking to exert control.

2. Psychology, politics, and oppression: A deep dive into Iran's psychological landscape

On one hand, we are faced with the Psychological and Counselling Organisation (PCO) and its affiliated institutions as the main suppressive entities of psychological well-being in the IRI. The PCO seems to be an independent non-governmental body functioning within the borders of Iran. The primary objectives of this establishment are to enhance the depth of psychological understanding and therapeutic practises, safeguard the entitlements of clients to receive services from psychologists and counsellors, and promote the professional rights of psychologists and counsellors. Nevertheless, it is imperative to acknowledge that this organisation maintains a significant association with the IRI system. The leadership of this organisation frequently comprises persons with conservative origins who have previously or presently occupied key positions within the Iranian government. The laws and regulations of the organisation are mostly shaped by the leader and their associates, who adhere to the values of the IRI. As a result, member debates and contributions hold relatively little significance. The organization's primary objective is to offer support and advocate for the principles of the IRI regime within psychology institutions. On the other hand, we observe various psychological groups and associations that, although associated with the PCO, have empathy with the protesters and are against the IRI authorities. While many celebrity psychologists or Instagram psychologists closed their pages or remained silent, some of them attempted to analyse the uprising from an individualistic perspective and constantly advocating for emotional acceptance, distancing themselves from the News and posing challenges related to reading books and other activities. Moreover, some tried to be volunteer psychologists and made free individual and collective sessions to solve the emotional problems that happened to the protesters or everyone who has affected by the WLF uprising. For this reason, many of them made great efforts to inform the public about the increase in mental illnesses following the WLF protests: "Nervous attacks, panic, anxiety, and depression have increased after September 2022, and more people have sought clinics for help" (Danaei,

2022). Beyond disseminating information, these groups also aimed to publish statements on the matter.

For example, the Iranian Psychological Association published a guideline titled: Telephone or Online Psychological Counselling for Individuals under Stress and Trauma. At the beginning of this guideline, they emphasized: "After experiencing the COVID-19 pandemic and dealing with the pressures of sanctions, Iranians have found themselves in a situation where they face increasing negative emotions and higher levels of stress due to recent social events..." They attempted to address abstract and ambiguous points about how to provide free telephone or online counselling, limited to a maximum of two half-hour sessions (Iranian Psychological Association, 2022). Some psychologists and mental health professionals who were more radical passed motions and statements in condemning IRI strategies which abuse the psychology. For example, associations in the field of mental-social health have protested the misuse of psychiatry and psychology in a statement: "In these complex times and amidst social crises, it is our human duty as professionals in the field of mental-social health to take care of the well-being of individuals in society... Unfortunately, recently some officials have made inaccurate and incorrect remarks, referring to protesters as psychiatric patients which fuels the suspicion of misuse of psychiatry and psychology... Statements implying inappropriate use of psychiatry and psychology in such cases will exacerbate the stigmatization of psychiatric and psychological disorders and treatments... We emphasize that we strongly oppose the use of psychiatry and psychology as a punishment or a means to deprive individuals of their social rights and consider it contrary to professional principles" (Iranian Psychological Association, 2022).

A group of psychologists apparently outside of Iran, in support of the Iranian people, made a petition and have called for an immediate end to violent crackdowns on protesters and the release of all detained individuals, including children and students, under the slogan "Psychology against Despotism." They declared, "In the path of the noble freedom-seeking movement of the Iranian people, we position ourselves not alongside them, but as part of them" (Psychology against Despotism, 2022).

In an open letter to Ebrahim Raisi, [President of Iran], the Iranian Association of Psychiatrists highlighted that the 44-year compulsory hijab rule has contributed to the weakening of mental health in society. They called for a "reconsideration of the fundamental law or at least its implementation methods." They also warned about the periodic shortages of neurologic and psychiatric medications, which have put a significant number of patients at risk (VOA News, 2022).

Some psychology students in six Iranian universities, on the occasion of "Psychologist's Day in Iran" published a statement condemning the "government's abuse of psychological sciences for oppression and tyranny" and the "psychological and academic institutions of the country that help to reproduce oppression". The signatories of this statement pointed out that "the government authorities attributed the deaths of children, teenagers and young people of this country to suicide, and added that even the country's mental hospitals have turned

into torture centres for political prisoners". In another part of this statement, they condemned the "abuse of the field of psychology in the path of oppression and tyranny" and wrote: "We will not allow the field of mental health to be used as a tool for political exploitation and oppression." And we ask for the acquittal of those who, with any position in the psychological and academic institutions of the country, help to reproduce oppression" (IranWire, 2023).

Within the realm of psychology in Iran, it has come to my attention that there exist three distinct groupings.

1. **Advocates of Oppression:** The initial category encompasses those affiliated with the field of psychology and counselling organization who publicly support oppressive policies. They demonstrate alignment with the principles of the IRI regime and actively advocate for its ideologies.

2. **The Pragmatic Reformists:** The second group comprises individuals who, while privately opposing the IRI's oppressive policies, choose to work within the system. They endeavour to obtain the endorsement of organisations in order to gain employment as psychologists and establish psychology clinics. Despite having objections towards the dictatorship, these individuals in question uphold a conservative outward appearance, prioritising personal validation, financial gains, and the establishment of clinics. They may be perceived as advocates of some kind of reformism, while some in this group advocate for the regime's overthrow, but not a revolution in different spheres of the regime.

3. **The Activist Minority:** The third group, a field minority, is mostly made up of politically active students. They do not hide their resistance to the regime's harsh activities, unlike the second category. Inside psychology departments, they actively engage in various forms of activism and are linked with seeking change and questioning the status quo rather than working inside the present system. They reflect a more combative approach to dealing with challenges in Iran's psychological area.

My primary concern with these actions is that all of these three groups of psychologists and mental health professionals are believed to view the authorities as abusing psychology. However, the truth is that psychology itself is inherently insulting and oppressive. Even when a psychologist attempts to genuinely listen and empathize with their clients while addressing their problems, they inadvertently create a situation where the client remains trapped in the same social position without initiating any meaningful change. The therapist fails to explore the roots of oppression with the client and instead reduces the issue to a purely intrapersonal level. Clients are merely encouraged to adapt to their environment and return to their work and family, without being guided to understand the underlying causes of their problems or helping them to fight against them. Consequently, while clients may make some changes in their lives, they are rarely presented with the opportunity to enact fundamental changes that would impact everyone's lives.

In addition to this central point, psychologists typically hold weekly sessions with clients, where they become aware of the most private and personal issues of the client's life. However, these significant interactions often remain confined to the realm of interpersonal relationships throughout the therapist's

lifetime. The therapist fails to connect the personal issues to broader political contexts, which perpetuates a form of oppression. How can it be possible to deal with anxiety, depression, and constant insomnia even after the passing of years solely by analysing and discussing one's relationships with parents and loved ones? Does not this constitute a form of client abuse?

3. The discourse of psychology

Although WLF uprising was one of the first times that Iranian psychologists, especially female psychologists, dealt with social issues beyond individual concerns, their analyses and prescriptions were ultimately tied to individual issues and perspectives. This is not a new issue. We have already learned that many psychologists ignore the social structures of oppression, and this leads to a false perspective and ineffective demands, and this is not only the problem of psychologists, rather, but the dominant discourse of mental health professionals is also often incapable of social understanding and alternative social narratives. (Teo, 2005, Parker, 2003, Schraube, & Osterkamp, 2013). At the same time, we are also aware of dialectics in the sense that we cannot understand people apart from their environment (Blunden, 2016). We have learned that people are shaped and influenced by the society they belong to and change their society through their own praxis (Marx, 1888). But unfortunately, this understanding is ignored by the dominant discourse of mental health professionals. An Individualistic approach of understanding without social understanding not only fails to facilitate change, but also helps to reproduce the prevailing conditions (Schraube, & Osterkamp, 2013). Actions such as those contained in short-term statements of psychological associations seek to conform and maintain loyal to the system or, at best, try to overthrow the regime (without making) a revolutionary change.

The reality is that we cannot deny the growth of problems that occur at the individual level. The simplest example is that we wake up and go to sleep with anxiety. However, psychologists do not address the fact that our internal problems arise because of living in this turbulent society, and revolutionary changes in the relationship between the individual and fundamental structures are needed to disrupt/tackle these problems (Parker, 2007). The problems created by this flawed system are categorized, labelled, and attributed by mental health professionals. Following these labels, most therapeutic approaches begin, are usually based on the interests of capitalists rather than revolutionary theories and empirical experiments (Schraube, & Osterkamp, 2013). In the logic of capitalism, a person either must work in an office, factory, or at home (being exploited and alienated) or to be prisoner, a patient in hospitals, or a client in psychotherapy clinics (being disciplined and rehabilitated). In both cases, individuals become a means for the economic goals of capitalists. Psychological discourse, despite its efforts to assist individuals in addressing mental health issues, can inadvertently assume the role of an oppressor.

Capitalism, which subsumed patriarchy and misogyny (Fraser, 2022), while there have been some improvements for women, imposes its own suppression on

women. It is not surprising that women are the largest recipients of psychological and psychiatric services. In these circumstances, it easily marginalizes women, constantly instils doubt in their abilities, justifies oppression to the oppressors, and ultimately limits their freedom. These conditions become even more pronounced when it comes to women in the lower layers of the working class, who are doubly oppressed. Despite the limitations of psychology in providing objective understanding and clear prescriptions, it employs alternative methods and tools for them in the best-case scenario. The essence of psychological understanding in this statement can be summarized as: "These women need to become empowered." However, empowerment in this context has been emptied of its true meaning and mostly implies that these women should learn resilience to contribute to the empowerment of capitalists and become facilitators of entrepreneurs' profits. On one hand, it perceives working-class women as weak, incapable, and insignificant, requiring guidance from the elites and the powerful. On the other hand, after years of implementing neoliberal policies, not only is there no evidence of women's empowerment, but there have not been significant changes in poverty reduction either. Instead, women have been subjected to even greater exploitation. Since patriarchy ensures that it is men who enjoy the benefit of wielding economic power, the fight for the emancipation of women also entails a fight against capital.

According to the psychology framework, my argument is that even when a psychologist desires to radicalise a social movement and instigate change, they frequently face significant obstacles in making this connection. It appears that psychologists face a binary choice: either they explicitly associate themselves with the government, thereby contributing to suppression, or they indirectly, albeit in a less obvious way, help to maintain the current conditions. As a result, psychologists are frequently at risk of unintentionally maintaining current society norms and institutions.

4. Moving towards the impossible

Considering the arguments and concrete examples I have presented; it becomes evident that the concept of psychology is fundamentally flawed. Nevertheless, can psychology still be harnessed for the benefit of revolutionary movements? Despite initial scepticisms, it is worth exploring the realm of critical psychology and its potential to navigate this seeming impossibility. In the subsequent discussion, I aim to illustrate how psychology can actively contribute to serving revolutionary movements, utilizing a suggestion. I think a type of psychology that tries to transcend the individualistic approach to mental issues and instead connects an individual's concerns to their societal origins, thereby changing personal matters into political ones, has the potential to affect significant and successful change in current circumstances. In my opinion, the third group, the activist minority, has the potential for revolutionary change if they become aware of the underlying elements and roots of psychology, as well as its role in sustaining oppression.

If we look at the neighbourhood committees during the WLF uprising, we can observe they play a crucial role in amplifying the voices of the Iranian people within the country. These committees have emerged because of the spontaneous participation of young individuals in protests the (IRI) regime across various provinces. While they are still in the early stages of self-organisation, they possess progressive and radical agendas and perspectives, actively working to mobilize the residents of their respective neighbourhoods. The primary objective of these committees is to uphold a revolutionary discourse and maintain their independence from political parties with reactionary backgrounds. They strive to create a platform that represents the aspirations and grievances of the people, focusing on the needs and demands of their local communities. By doing so, they aim to unite individuals, fostering a sense of collective identity and solidarity among the residents. These committees serve as a guiding force for protesters within their neighbourhoods. They provide essential information, coordinate actions, and offer strategic guidance, ensuring that the demonstrations remain organised, purposeful, and impactful. They are acting as a bridge between the protesters and the wider society. They seek to tie the concerns and demands of the people to the larger street protests (Manjanigh, 2023). While facing numerous challenges and obstacles, including government repression and surveillance, these committees persevere in their efforts to bring about meaningful change. They represent the hopes and aspirations of a generation of Iranians who seek a revolutionary society. Through their grassroots organising, progressive agendas, and determination to remain independent, they continue to inspire and mobilize the local people, contributing to the ongoing struggle for a better Iran.

At first I thought if we consider neighbourhood committees as the healthy nucleus for revolutionary change, what if psychological clinics were organically linked to them? In Iran today, even in small towns, there is at least one psychological clinic in each neighbourhood. However, the predominant focus of these clinics is not on genuine emancipation of the people but rather on individualistic understanding and analysis, their own financial interests, and monthly profits. It is evident that if they were to change their strategies for interacting with neighbourhood committees, they would be at risk of losing their professional identity. To achieve true alignment between these clinics and the goals of neighbourhood committees, a fundamental shift in their approach is necessary. They must go beyond limited financial pursuits and embrace a broader vision that prioritizes societal emancipation. By doing so, the clinics would undergo a profound transformation that entails a complete change in their name and the elimination of the core discourse of traditional psychology. To effectively engage with neighbourhoods, these clinics must adopt a comprehensive understanding of human experiences, including the concept of "Perezhivanie" - experiences in which individuals change their relation to their environment (Blunden, 2016). They need to develop a materialist understanding of history and familiarize themselves with the social-political context in which events unfold. However, from an ontological perspective, I believe that such a profound change is impossible; psychological clinics cannot fundamentally alter their entire ontological structure.

Yet, I believe that the minority activists who are actively challenging the IRI regime and aim to employ psychology as a revolutionary tool, making nuanced changes, may gradually bring revolution in the discourse of psychology. The potential of these people to establish connections with neighbourhood committees holds the promise of transforming their approach and moving away from repressive discourse. For example, psychological sessions would no longer take place behind closed doors but would focus on collective problem-solving. By collaborating with neighbourhood committees, (apparently) personal issues will be examined in connection with everyday social events, including the current social movement(s). All individuals participate in committee sessions and learn to understand and analyse the link between personal issues and current and historical social movements in the country, rather than solely acquiring coping mechanisms and anxiety reduction techniques. It will become evident that despite of individual suffering; all individuals share a common pain. By observing and analysing these connections, these people in connections to neighbourhood committees can effectively address fundamental issues and promote changes within society.

Furthermore, these new forms of psychology should actively seek to establish connections with global movements and recognize the interconnectedness of social struggles beyond borders. For instance, by studying the other global movements, they can strengthen the sense of solidarity and leverage successes and challenges faced by similar movements worldwide. This broader perspective enables them to provide more comprehensive and relevant support to individuals in their immediate vicinity. Additionally, an interdisciplinary approach is essential for them to fully address the complex nature of psychological well-being. They must actively engage with other scientific fields such as sociology, anthropology, and political science to gain a more holistic understanding of the individual and their social context. Their interdisciplinary approach help them to create new forms of community-oriented entities instead of profit-driven institutions, actively contributing to the emancipation and consciousness of the people.

Conclusion

The uprising of Women, Life, Freedom (WLF) in Iran has revealed the cruelty and brutal violence of the Islamic Republic regime more than ever. In this article, I tried to deal with the psychological aspects of this oppression and clarify how psychology is used as a tool to suppress and control the uprising. The dominant discourse of psychology has often failed to address social structures of oppression, leading to limited understanding and ineffective solutions. The individualistic approach of psychology ignores the influence of society on individuals and perpetuates the prevailing conditions. Moreover, the flawed system of capitalism, patriarchy and misogyny exacerbates women's marginalization and limits their freedom. The concept of revolutionary psychology is fundamentally flawed within the current structure of psychology,

but there is potential to overcome this challenge. I believe that a transformational change can occur by creating organic connections between minority activists, psychologists who actively engage in protest movements and recognize the significance of political issues and their links to individual problems- and grassroots neighbourhood committees. This combination can adopt a holistic understanding of the human experience, prioritize social emancipation, and engage in collective problem solving with a focus on social movements. Recognizing the interconnectedness of global movements and adopting an interdisciplinary approach, these clinics can actively contribute to the liberation and well-being of people in their communities. This requires a fundamental shift in approach, moving beyond profit-based interests to becoming community-oriented institutions that promote meaningful change and challenge the status quo. I believe that the emerging models of psychology will revert to traditional psychology clinics if they do not actively engage with protesters in a radical manner. Establishing an organic connection with protesters and addressing their issues can bolster the strength of these movements and give rise to innovative forms of psychology.

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Hope in the wake of rape: Mourning, rage and refusal in womxn's accounts of sexual violation

Rebecca Helman

Abstract

This paper explores if hope is possible in the wake of rape. Drawing on in-depth interviews with 16 womxn who have been raped in South Africa it explores how hope emerges within the context of endemic sexual violence. Moving beyond individualistic, (neo)liberal conceptions of hope proposed by mainstream psychology, I offer a social-political conception of hope that is bound up with mourning, rage, and refusal. This is a hope both constituted by and disruptive of the current state of sexual violence in South Africa. Womxn reflected on the normalisation of sexual violence and how this constrains the possibilities of constructing a different society. Yet, simultaneously, womxn's refusal of dominant understandings of rape demonstrates how sharing stories provides opportunities for solidarity which disrupt the isolation and alienation produced by rape. In the face of dismissal, denial, and shame, sharing their pain and violation, womxn perform a hopeful act, which demands care and empathy both within and beyond the interview. Womxn articulate hope in the wake of rape enmeshed with hopelessness and the pain of the present, without foreclosing possibilities for less unequal, less unjust, and less violent futures.

Keywords

Hope, rape, South Africa, refusal, rage, mourning



“About a thousand women march against gender based violence in Cape Town, South Africa” on 1 August 2018. Photo by Ashraf Hendricks. © 2016-2020

GroundUp. 

<https://www.groundup.org.za/imagegallery/photo/1100/>

As we face ongoing crises in relation to climate change, war, the cost of living, migration, and the COVID-19 pandemic, among many others, questions about the possibilities of or hopes for a better future loom large. In my own work with womxn¹ who have been raped² in South Africa, I found myself often returning to questions of hope – could there be hope in the wake of rape, and if so, what kind of hope would this be? In this paper, I present a critical and situated exploration of hope within the context of endemic sexual violence, developed in relation to the narratives of the 16 womxn I interviewed. Moving beyond individualistic, (neo)liberal conceptions of hope proposed by mainstream psychology, I offer a social-political conception of hope that is bound up with mourning, rage, and refusal. This is a hope both constituted by and disruptive of the current state of sexual violence in South Africa. I begin by outlining the dominant ways in which hope has been conceptualised within mainstream psychology, as well as the problematics of these conceptions. I then discuss more critical conceptions of hope which are embedded within the inequalities of the present. I outline the

¹ The term ‘womxn’ is used to refer to all people who identify as women, female, femme, or trans. This term is intended to highlight the diverse and fluid ways in which gender is experienced and constructed.

² Within feminist scholarship there has been significant debate about whether to use the terms “victims” or “survivors” of rape. The term “victim” is seen to denote powerlessness and passivity, while “survivor” denotes resilience and agency (Alcoff & Gray, 1993). However, these binary categories preclude more complex understandings of how individuals may negotiate their post-rape experiences (for example, as simultaneous “victim-survivors” or by oscillating between these two categories). I have therefore chosen to use the term “womxn who have been raped”.

ways in which hope/hopelessness are socially and politically constituted in the South African context, including in relation to sexual violence. I then turn to hope in the wake of rape, as developed within the narratives of 16 womxn who have been raped in South Africa.

Conceptualising hope

Hope has a long history as an object of philosophical, religious, and artistic exploration (Kleist & Jansen, 2016). Within the humanities and social sciences, the notion of hope has been explored from many different disciplinary perspectives (Lopez et al., 2003). Broadly, hope has been defined as “what sustains life in the face of despair” (Zournazi, 2002, p. 15). Hope is also commonly bound up with orientations towards the future (Hage, 2016; Kleist & Jansen, 2016). Within the discipline of psychology, one of the central conceptualisations of hope was developed by Charles R. Snyder. He proposed that: “hope is defined as the process of thinking about one’s goals along with the motivation to move towards (agency) and the ways to achieve (pathways) those goals” (Snyder, 1995, p. 335). This two-factor model of hope has been central to the development of positive psychology (Colla et al., 2022). Psychological science has demonstrated the benefits of hope for individual functioning, with psychological conceptions of hope being linked to post-traumatic growth, resilience, and recovery (Colla et al., 2022; Mosley et al., 2020; Park & Chen, 2016; Saint Arnault & Sinko, 2019). For example, hope is seen to promote feelings of well-being (Bennett, 2015; Cherrington, 2018). In contrast, a lack of hope or hopelessness is seen to be linked to depression, distress, and suicide across a range of different contexts (Abramson et al., 2002; Cohen et al., 2018; Klonsky et al., 2012; Liu et al., 2015).

Within mainstream psychology, hope (and hopelessness) tend to be conceptualised in liberal, decontextualized, and individualist ways, focusing on individual capacity, subjectivity, or behaviour (Bennett, 2015; Colla et al., 2022; Mosley et al., 2020). More critical scholarship (both within and beyond psychology) has highlighted the problematic effects of these kinds of constructions of hope. Individualistic conceptualisations of hope make individuals responsible for cultivating and sustaining hope, while failing to engage with the broader contexts in which hope is produced. Katie Stockdale (2021) has argued that it is necessary to attend to how oppression, privilege and power produce, shape, and damage people’s hopes. In certain contexts, “people, in virtue of their social, political, and locations must ‘hope against hope’ for many of their desires to be fulfilled, if they are capable of hope at all” (Stockdale, 2021, p. 27). For example, in conditions of extreme poverty where people are struggling to survive day by day, there are limited possibilities for hopeful orientations towards the future (Long, 2021). Within (neo)liberal contexts hope may also operate to create particular kinds of aspirations which obscure the structural conditions of capitalism and inequality; for example, hope for upwards social mobility through ‘hard work’ (Hage, 2003; Wrangel, 2017). These kinds

of hopes may simultaneously create tolerance for uncertainty, insecurity, and poverty in the present, suspending people in a continual not-yet, rather than producing desires for political mobilisation, refusal, and the imagining of alternative worlds (Wrangel, 2017).

In contrast to mainstream psychological conceptions, more critical conceptualisations of hope engage with the painful inequalities of the present (Boler, 2004; Wale, 2022). These conceptualisations of hope are entangled with feelings of anger, bitterness, unhappiness, despair, and melancholy (Stockdale, 2021; Thaler, 2019; Unni, 2022; Winters, 2016; Wood & Litherland, 2018). For example, Winters (2016) has proposed a melancholic hope, which “in opposition to triumphant, overconfident narratives, tropes, and images, suggests that a better, less pernicious world depends partly on our heightened capacity to remember, contemplate, and be unsettled by [...] violence and suffering” (p. 16). A critical version of hope is thus one that critiques the past and troubles the present in order to seek what could be in the future (Cahill et al., 2010; Zembylas, 2022). In line with this critical approach, and in order to situate hope amidst current harrowing inequalities, I now turn to hope and hopelessness in the South African context.

A hopeful/less nation

In this section, I outline the broader context of hope and hopelessness in which my research is located. This includes the broader politics of hope, as well as the ways in which hope and hopelessness are entangled with sexual violence. The notion of hope has been central to the democratic project in South Africa. Describing the new South Africa, Ian Shapiro and Kahreen Tebeau (2011) write:

How could one overstate the hope and enthusiasm that accompanied its improbable birth? Millions throughout the country and around the world cheered as long lines of first-time voters queued patiently for hours in those three days in late April 1994 to legitimate the peaceful transition from apartheid and to select their first democratic government [...] it was a dream that many South Africans [...] never believed would come true (p. 1).

For millions of people, the hope of the new South Africa was the hope of living free from segregation and police harassment, the hope of access to basic amenities including sanitation, water and electricity, the hope of having a house made of bricks, the hope of new possibilities for dignity and respect (Ross, 2009). It was the hope of ‘a better life for all’, as articulated in the ANC’s 1994 election campaign. Since 1994 however, this hope has been repeatedly frustrated, as social and economic inequalities continue to haunt South Africa (Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2018; Wale, 2022). Amongst recent responses to the painfully slow process of societal change were the Fallist³ student movements in 2015 and 2016.

³ The Rhodes Must Fall (RMF) movement began at the University of Cape Town (UCT) in 2015. Rhodes Must Fall (2015) describes itself as “an independent collective of students, workers and staff who have

These protests signal the ending of a politics of patience and hope (Pillay, 2016). The students, who have been ‘born free’⁴, ragefully⁵ disrupt discourses of healing, reconciliation, and ‘transformation’ that have characterised the post-apartheid context, thus demanding an end to a permanent state of ‘waithood’ (Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2018; Riaz-Mohamed, 2015). Kim Wale, Pumla Gobodo-Madikizela and Jeffrey Praeger (2020) have referred to this as ‘haunted hope’, through which students (re)live the inequalities of the past, both within and beyond the university. The protests are disruptions of the ‘new South Africa’ as a project of hope – the students (and many others) are no longer prepared to wait hopefully for that which has been promised to them.

The issue of endemic gender-based and sexual violence in South Africa is also one which evokes both hopelessness and hope. South Africa is frequently referred to as ‘the rape capital of the world’ (Dosekun, 2013; Jewkes & Abrahams, 2002; van Schalkwyk, 2018). Research has repeatedly demonstrated alarmingly high rates of sexual violence. For example, one study found that 27.6 % of men reported having raped a woman (Jewkes et al., 2011). Another study found a lifetime sexual violence prevalence of 24.9% among women aged 18-49 (Steele et al., 2019). A third, (37.9%) of 17-24-year-old women surveyed at a university, reported having experienced sexual violence (Ajayi & Ezegbel, 2020). These statistics are accompanied by a “grammar of horror such as endemic baby rape, corrective lesbian and grand-mother rapes” perpetuated by the South African media (Hirschauer, 2014, p. 84). Pumla Gqola (2015) has proposed that contemporary South Africa is constituted by “the female fear factory” or “the manufacture of female fear”, through which the threat of rape works to “remind wom[x]n that they are not safe and that their bodies are not entirely theirs” (pp. 78-79). Within this context the sexual violation of womxn has, to a great extent, become normalised, creating a widespread sense of hopelessness about the possibilities of intervening in and disrupting this status quo.

come together to end institutionalised racism and patriarchy at UCT” (n.p). Following the Rhodes Must Fall student protests, Fees Must Fall began in October 2015, as a student movement to protest against annual fee increases. Collectively Rhodes Must Fall and Fees Must Fall are referred to as the Fallist student movements.

⁴ The term ‘born frees’ refers to the generation of South Africans who were born after 1994.

⁵ I articulate rage as a particular kind of anger. While anger is an affective response to (perceived) injustice, rage is a reaction to the refusal to attend to this appeal for justice (Lyman, 2004). Rage is, thus, an affective response produced by being unable to take any more suffering, anguish, or distress, unable to remain painfully constructed any longer (Canham, 2018).



“Thousands protest against gender based violence outside Parliament in Cape Town, South Africa” on 5 September 2019. Photo by Ashraf Hendricks. © 2016-2020 GroundUp 

<https://www.groundup.org.za/imagegallery/photo/1317/>

In the face of continued violation of womxn’s bodily autonomy and the failure of various institutions, including the state and the police, to take this violence seriously, activist and performative interventions have been staged with increasing frequency to call attention to and challenge the ongoing onslaught of violence against womxn in South Africa (Shefer, 2019). Recent interventions, which I outline briefly below, include #RememberKhwezi⁶, #RURreferenceList⁷ and #TotalShutDown⁸/ #AmINext17⁹.

On the 6th of August 2016, during the Independent Electoral Commission’s (IEC) ceremony announcing the results of the election, Simamkele Dlakavu, Tinyiko Shikwambane, Naled Chirwa and Amanda Mavuso stood up as, then president, Jacob Zuma was addressing the nation. With their backs to Zuma, facing the crowd and the cameras, they held up placards that read “I am 1 in 3”¹⁰ “10 yrs later” “Remember Khwezi” and “Khanga”¹¹ (Wazar, 2016). The protest was a disruption of the narrative of democratic progress in South Africa, demanding that the nation reflect on how womxn are continually failed within

⁶ https://twitter.com/hashtag/RememberKhwezi?src=hashtag_click

⁷ <https://twitter.com/hashtag/rureferencelist?lang=en>

⁸ https://twitter.com/hashtag/TotalShutdown?src=hashtag_click

⁹ <https://twitter.com/VinylAngel/status/1168515790280318978>

¹⁰ This is a reference to the widely circulated statistic that 1 in 3 womxn in South Africa will be raped in her lifetime.

¹¹ ‘Khanga’ refers to the draped cloth that Fezekile was wearing on the night that she was raped by Zuma. During the trial Zuma testified that her wearing of the khanga was an invitation for him to have sex with her.

the new South Africa (Gqola, 2017). The reference to “10 yrs later” was a prompt to reflect on the fact that it had been 10 years since Jacob Zuma was acquitted of raping Fezekile Ntsukela Kuzwayo.

On the 17th of April 2016 a list of eleven men’s names and “et al” (denoting “and others”) was published on the Rhodes University Queer Confessions and Crushes Facebook page – entitled “Reference List” (Seddon, 2016). The list was posted as a response to the university management removing posters protesting against sexual violence. One of the posters stated: “You are more likely to be excluded for plagiarism than you are for rape” (Haith, 2016, n.p.). Following the publishing of the RU Reference List, womxn and queer students disrupted university classes and marched topless to protest against the university management’s repeated failure to respond to rape on campus (Gouws, 2018). The protest quickly spread to other South African universities, including UCT, the University of the Western Cape (UWC), the University of Kwa-Zulu Natal (UKZN), and the University of Witwatersrand (WITS) (Shewarega Hussen, 2018)¹².

In August 2019, which is celebrated as ‘Women’s month’ in South Africa to commemorate the 1956 Women’s march to the Union Buildings, at least 30 women from a range of different backgrounds, in different parts of the country, were killed, many of them by their partners (Davis & Kubheka, 2019). Widely publicised cases included those of Uyinene Mrwetyana, Leighandre ‘Baby Lee’ Jegels, Janika Mallo, Jesse Hess, Meghan Cremer and Lynette Volschenk (BBC, 2019; Merten, 2019). Many of these womxn were subjected to sexual violence before being killed. August 2019 represented just one moment in the relentless assault, both embodied and symbolic, on the bodies and senses of womxn in South Africa (Gqola, 2017). In particular, the rape and murder of Uyinene Mrwetyana by a post-office worker when she went to collect a parcel, provoked wide-spread outrage and horror (Levitt, 2019). Uyinene’s murder sparked hashtags such as #AmINext and #SAShutDown (Levitt, 2019; Lyster, 2019). Protests, led by womxn and queer people, were staged in both Johannesburg and Cape Town in response to what many called “the war on womxn’s bodies” (Hoosain Khan, 2019, n.p.).

I read these protests as acts of critical hope, which are “radically unreconciled to the present” (Eagleton, 2015, p. 69). Through these protests womxn make the pain of rape intelligible, while demonstrating rage that these conditions prevail (Gouws, 2018). These are acts of collective mourning – for all the womxn (and people of other genders) that have been violated. These protests refuse and disrupt dominant narratives about rape – as individualised acts committed by a select number of perpetrators and which blame womxn for being raped. Instead, they assert that rape is rooted in cultures of patriarchy which denies womxn’s humanity, dignity, and rights, in line with critical feminist perspectives (Alcoff, 2018; Gqola, 2015; Mazibuko, 2018). These protests are

¹² Both the Remember Khwezi protest and the RU Reference list occurred within the context of the Fallist student movements and calls to decolonise institutions of higher education in South Africa. Within the Fallist student movements there were multiple instances of violence against female and queer activists by their male comrades (Lujabe, 2016; Ndlovu, 2017; Ratele, 2018).

also examples of how hope is cultivated alongside rage under conditions of oppression (Stockdale, 2021). Here rage is both a response to the injustice of the violation of rape and a response to the failure to take it seriously. Thus, rage is not only directed towards rapists but also towards “a world that reproduces that violence by explaining it away” (Ahmed, 2017, p. 31). In demanding the protection of womxn’s rights and dignity, they demand a different future. Thus, these protests “provide hope and inspiration for collective action to build collective power to achieve collective transformation, rooted in grief and rage but pointed towards vision and dreams” (Cullors in Solnit, 2016, p. xiv). They are examples of how hope can be cultivated through solidarity or hoping together (Stockdale, 2021). It is within this context in which hope is enmeshed with hopelessness, mourning, rage and refusal in which my own research about rape is located. Below I provide a brief overview of the research project before turning to my analysis of hope in the wake of rape.



“Hundreds gather outside the Johannesburg Stock Exchange (JSE) to protest against gender based violence” on 13 September 2019. Photo by Zoë Postman. © 2016-2020 GroundUp. 

<https://www.groundup.org.za/imagegallery/photo/1324/>

Exploring experiences of rape

Broadly, my research explored how womxn’s feelings about their experiences of rape are structured by the social context of sexual violence in South Africa. Here feelings are conceptualised not as individual psychological dispositions but as mediations between the psychic and the social and between the collective and the

individual (Ahmed, 2015). This approach was informed by affective, feminist, decolonial and African-centred perspectives. I was interested in “processes of affecting and being affected” and affect and affectivity in relation to what bodies can, and do, do in relation to other bodies (Ahmed, 2015, p. 208; Lykke, 2018). This included attending to the ways in which the womxn I interviewed and I are deeply *affected* by being situated in (South) Africa (Ratele, 2019). My approach builds on the work of both feminist and decolonial scholars who have demonstrated the ways in which oppression is enacted at the level of feelings¹³ (e.g. Ahmed, 2015; Lorde, 1984; Fanon, 1967). This approach pays attention to “how power circulates through feelings and how politically salient ways of being and knowing are produced through affective relations” (Pedwell & Whitehead, 2012, p. 116). As well as the ways in which what is felt has the potential to break down, reinforce, build up and bring into focus the multiple frames through which life is structured (Engle & Wong, 2018). I understand hope as a relational, political, visceral, and embodied element of everyday life, constituted by structures of power and operating as a possibility for resistance (Suffla et al., 2020).

I recruited participants via the Rape Crisis Cape Town Trust Facebook page¹⁴. Anybody who identified as having been raped and who identified as a womxn was eligible for inclusion in the research. I interviewed the first 16 womxn that contacted me. The interviews were conducted between August 2018 and May 2020. I also drew on my own experience of rape and shared this with participants in the interviews (Ellis & Bochner, 2000). I interviewed each participant twice, to build trust and develop in-depth, nuanced understandings of their experiences. Participants selected the time and place for the interviews. Two interviews were conducted over the phone due to my inability to travel to those parts of the country¹⁵. The interviews were semi-structured, guided by open-ended questions about participants’ experiences of rape, as well as their reflections on rape within the South African context more broadly. Prior to the initial interview I provided each participant with an information sheet, outlining the details of the study. Participants were required to sign a consent form before the interview began. Participants who were interviewed over the phone were asked to give verbal consent. I provided each participant with a list of counselling resources they could access in the case that they experienced the interview as distressing. Despite the sensitive nature of the topic, most of the participants appeared to experience the opportunity to share their experiences as largely constructive, cathartic and affirming. Some of them explicitly reflected on this in the follow up interview. I shared my analysis with all my participants to ensure that they were comfortable with the ways in which I had represented

¹³ I have chosen to employ the term feelings in recognition of the “the ambiguity between feelings as embodied sensations and feelings as psychic or cognitive experiences” (Cvetkovich, 2012, p. 80).

¹⁴ I chose this strategy so that the invitation to participate in the research would not be completely out of the blue, in order to avoid triggering people. Through this platform, participants were already engaged in a space in which rape was discussed.

¹⁵ Despite the less personal nature of a phone interview, I felt it was important to include the experiences of womxn who live outside of the main national metropolises in order to diversify the perspectives offered by my research.

them and their experiences. None of the participants raised any concern with my analysis and some of them acknowledged the significance of being able to read what I had written.

Participants

The womxn I interviewed were aged between 19 and 50, with the majority of them being in their late 20s. Nine participants self-identified as ‘white’, six as ‘black’ and one as ‘mixed heritage’. Nine participants self-identified as heterosexual, five as queer, one as lesbian and one as bi-sexual. Most of them lived in middle-class neighbourhoods (12) and had completed university level education (13). All participants identified as South African, except one, who identified as Zimbabwean. Six of the participants indicated their first language as English, two as Shona, two as isi-Xhosa, two as Afrikaans, two as both English and Afrikaans, one as Sotho, and one as Venda. Due to my own linguistic limitations, all the interviews were conducted in English. Most participants (10) lived in Cape Town, two in Pretoria, two in Johannesburg, one in a town in the North West province and one in a township south of Gauteng. I have used pseudonyms to protect all participants’ identities. I provide details of each of the participants whose narratives I share below, in recognition that their identities and experiences are not reducible to the categories I have provided here.

Analysis: Hope after rape

I have felt utterly hopeless in many moments during my research with womxn who had been raped. The magnitude of the violations that were shared with me, not only the acts of rape themselves but the lack of care by medical personnel, the police, family members and friends, as well as society more broadly was, in many moments, beyond comprehension. Simultaneously, as I was collecting narratives from womxn, I was constantly bombarded by newspaper headlines proclaiming grotesque acts of violence: ‘HALF-NUDE TEEN FOUND DEAD IN TOILET’ and ‘RAPED BY FIVE MEN IN ONE DAY’. Thus, a sense of deep hopelessness was a key part of what it felt like to do this research. This feeling of hopelessness was echoed by Jamie¹⁶ in our initial interview. She said: “there’s a lot more of... like hopelessness, I suppose. Like ‘ah fuck is this shit ever gonna end?’” And yet, as the project was drawing to an end, in awe of the fierce vulnerability of all the womxn who had shared with me, I found myself returning to hope (Helman, 2022).

In engaging with (critical) hope, I seek to disrupt racist and colonial constructions of South Africa as a place ‘without hope’. As Floretta Boonzaier (2017) has powerfully demonstrated, poor, ‘black’ communities with high rates

¹⁶ Jamie described herself as: “I... er am a counsellor [...] I am a white queer person [...] Um... so... middle-class upbringing, Joburg all the way. Um... er a mixture of private and public schooling throughout primary and high school”.

of violent crime in South Africa are repeatedly represented in the mainstream news media as hopeless spaces. She shows how one particular community is described as “as a place of hopelessness, with ‘social ills’, including high levels of alcohol abuse, ‘broken families’, unemployment, poverty, high school dropout rates, drug abuse, and teenage pregnancies” (Boonzaier, 2017, p. 474). These images form part of a broader archive through which African people are rendered as passive victims of violence, trapped in conditions of unlivability (Judge, 2015; Mavuso et al., 2019; Shefer, 2018; Tamale, 2011). Thus, to construct people as being without hope is to deny possibilities for resistance, refusal and re-making of the world. To deny hope in the wake of rape is to reproduce notions of womxn who have been raped as ‘irreparably damaged’ (Barker & Macleod, 2018). Yet, I remain cognisant that a focus on hope in the wake of rape also has the potential to reinscribe glorified conceptions of survivorship, which deny the ongoing pain that ‘survival’ entails. Thus, I develop a social-political conception of hope in the wake of rape; a hope bound up with mourning, rage and refusal. As I will show this is a hope which is full of pain, rooted in woundedness and committed to mourning what has been lost (Bozalek et al., 2014; Thaler, 2019; Winters, 2016).

My analytical approach was guided by the following (entangled) questions: what are participants’ affective responses to their experiences of rape? How are these affective responses entangled with the socio-political context of rape in South Africa? How am I affected by what participants tell me? What does my affective response indicate about the broader affective context of rape? My analysis was developed through multiple close readings of interview transcripts and extracts from my research diary, which I used throughout the research process to record reflections. The interview transcripts and research diary extracts were coded in relation to different affective responses to rape. Through repeated engagement with each individual transcript, as well as reading the transcripts as a ‘whole’, I identified the most dominant affective responses to rape, of which hope was one.

The pain of hope

All the womxn I spoke to reflected on the endemic nature of sexual (and other forms of gendered) violence in the South African context. This normalisation of sexual and other forms of violence against womxn constrains the possibilities of constructing a different kind of society.

Buhle¹⁷: Society is shaped in a way that healing is not something that supposedly happens naturally, that when you get your, when you you you you, when you get raped [...] the society is is is channelled in a way that um everything that they do in society just drive you to feeling more unworthy [Rebecca: Mhmm], more unnormal [Rebecca: Mhmm] [...] I think if society was welcoming of victims er

¹⁷ Buhle described herself as: “I’m a 27 year old. I am married. I’ve got two kids. I’m a stay at home mom. Um but I do have a qualification that I did at UJ. Um I love my kids. I love my life. Um ja there are still things that I you know have to work through as a survivor but generally I’m a happy person [...] I’m black... um straight [my home language is] Xhosa”.

and survivors it would, healing would come easier (Second interview, phone, 23 May 2020).

Tanya¹⁸: I really hope that...in a generation or two from now people will...have to think hard about what is rape again and... [Rebecca: Mhmm] things like- that would make me happy...if it could be like that, I'll be very happy. And if I can- in my generation get to a point where, when things like this happen to women...they feel free [Rebecca: Mhmm] ...to...report it...[Rebecca: Mhmm] to see justice being done [Rebecca: Mhmm]...and to feel that...there's a society around them that will embrace them [Rebecca: Mhmm] (Second interview, coffee shop, Johannesburg, 5 May 2019).

Both Buhle and Tanya articulate how the contemporary context creates barriers to “healing” and “justice” for womxn who have been raped. They reflect on how shame is a central affective barrier as womxn are made to feel “unworthy” and “unnatural” and they do not feel “free to report” rape. This echoes other research, which has shown how womxn who have been raped are shamed (Fleming & Kruger, 2013; Gavey, 2005; Gordon & Riger, 1989; Womersley, et al., 2011). Here, Buhle and Tanya express the pain and the struggle that ‘surviving’ rape entails. It is in response to this pain and struggle that they imagine a different kind of society – one in which “healing would come easier” and in which womxn who experience rape will be “embrace[d]”.

Alongside this, Tanya also articulated a hope for a society in which rape is unimaginable. I argue that these are examples of hope intertwined with despair (Thaler, 2019). It is in recognising and explicating the current situation of survival as untenable that Buhle and Tanya are able to articulate a need for transformation (Eagleton, 2015). Their notions of “healing”, “justice” and being “welcomed” and “embraced” are constituted in relation to the current configurations of pain, shame, silencing, alienation and isolation produced by rape. In gesturing towards hopefulness Buhle and Tanya do not banish their despair (Mayes & Holdsworth, 2020), nor do they embody a hope that escapes from the present (Zaliwska & Boler, 2019). In fact, it is the acknowledgment of past and present pain, despair and horror that comes to circumscribe the possibilities of a different future (Thaler, 2019). While both Buhle and Tanya present (hopeful) imaginings of a different society, they simultaneously construct this alternative society as a distant possibility. Tanya’s reference to “in a generation or two from now” suggests that shifting social conditions in relation to rape will be a long process. This comment points to the entrenched and normalised nature of sexual violence in South Africa and how this constrains opportunities for hope. The hopelessness of the present recalls Jamie’s comment, mentioned above, which evokes the relentless of sexual violence: “Like ‘ah fuck is this shit ever gonna end?’”. This hopelessness is entangled with a broader state of hopelessness, about the lack of meaningful change that has taken place in

¹⁸ Tanya described herself as: “I’ve had a vary varied career. So I worked in... in IT and I’ve worked I’ve now recently started e- I’ve started my er being a lawyer... White, Afrikaans-speaking, I am financially comfortable. I’m extremely determined...I never stay down...I’m *extremely* resilient... I’m...I-or-I think...I’m the type of person that people like to take to war with them. Um...I’m dependable... but I’m also adventurous. I’m a pioneer...um...I *love*...breaking moulds I love enabling people...I *love* people. Um...I like helping people. Um...I’m a *strong* personality”.

South Africa since the birth of democracy and the promise of ‘better lives for all’. Buhle and Tanya’s hopes for a different future, entangled with the pain of the present, echo the demands of those protesting against rape and other forms of gender-based violence in South Africa.



“Women from Durban Deep, Johannesburg protest against gender-based violence and police inaction in December 2017”. Photo by Shaun Swingler (permission granted to re-produce image) <https://www.groundup.org.za/article/forgotten-mining-town-where-rape-normal/>

Performing hope

For many womxn to talk about rape is a difficult and painful experience. In my interviews there were frequent silences and whispers as my participants struggled to share their violations (Helman, 2022). Within a context steeped in shame, as Buhle describes above, to come forward to talk about rape, to share painfully despite past experiences of dismissal and denial, is to perform hope. As Terry Eagleton (2015) has argued, “hope is not simply an anticipation of the future but an active force in its constitution” (p. 84).

Faith¹⁹: Some people are also in my position. It might be a boyfriend or someone else [Rebecca: Mhmm] [...] ja so I know that for someone who would listen to my story or read my story they would probably be encouraged that you don't, it

¹⁹ Faith described herself as: “Well I’m thirty years old. I’m mother of two. My first girl is th- turning thirteen now and the other one is turning seven. But I live by myself i- here in Cape Town, my kids live with my mom in Zimbabwe. So um I work for a company that we... um they got contracts o-of new houses and they ma- let them out [...] and part-time I also do I’m a nanny [...] I’m well I’m a black girl, woman. Um... I’m from Zimbabwe. I speak Shona and... I go to church, part of the time I go to church but I’m I’m a Christian”.

doesn't, it d- it's it's not about the relations that you have [Rebecca: Mhmm] with someone else. If someone did that kind of thing to you it is still rape [Rebecca: Mhmm] you know? [Rebecca: Mhmm]. It doesn't matter who who who who did that to you [Rebecca: Mhmm] you know? (Second interview, coffee shop Cape Town, 12 May 2019).

Bianca²⁰: Shit there was a 17-year-old girl... who went through all of this um... who... who did e- I went through that alone... and... I don't want that for... for other people [inhales] (First interview, Bianca's house, Cape Town, 22 August 2018).

Here both Faith and Bianca articulate the hope for social responses to rape that are different from those that they experienced, in a similar way to Buhle and Tanya above. This performance of hope is linked to a desire to disrupt shame and silencing. Since the rapist was her ex-husband, Faith articulates how the myth that rape is perpetrated by strangers (Abrahams & Jewkes, 2010; Gavey, 2005) limits the support that womxn receive when they are raped by someone that they know. As Bianca recounts, she did not tell her family about the rape and so had to cope unsupported. Here she reflects on how she hopes that other womxn will not have to experience their rapes alone, as she did. Bianca's articulation of "shit" is full of both pain and rage, mourning her 17 year old self. This rage and mourning reverberates with that expressed by those involved in the #RememberKhwezi, #RURferenceList and #TotalShutDown and #AmINext interventions. Thus, Bianca and Faith's hope for something different emerges within the context of pain, shame and rage. This is a hope which recognises the ongoing difficulties of articulating the harm that rape wreaks. It is a hope which acknowledges the ongoing power of shame to blame and responsabilise womxn for being raped. It is a hope with mourns the isolation and lack of support that rape produces.

Faith and Bianca do not merely articulate hope for a different future but they *perform* this hope. In the face of shame, denial and dismissal, to come forward to share one's experience of violation is a hopeful act, which demands care and empathy both within and beyond the interview. For Bianca, Faith and many of the other womxn I interviewed, hope is performed through resisting shame and silence, in the act of daring to share despite these negative possibilities. It was through these hopeful acts, entangled with mourning, rage and refusal, in which womxn engendered care towards themselves in (re)articulating the locus of the violence and shame that had been inflicted upon them. It is these performances of hopeful love and care, which have evoked a sense of hope in me. In sharing their painful stories, the womxn I have interviewed hope to give hope to other womxn; a hope that they are not alone, that the rape is not their fault, a hope that places of support, love and rage, in

²⁰ Bianca described herself as: I'm doing my internship for to register with the [Health Professions Council of South Africa] as a research psychologist... I used to model and sometimes I miss that a lot. Um mainly because of the money [laughs][...] I'm a white female. I come from a er middle-class family. Um, English but I was raised in a fairly um conservative Afrikaans area [...] So ja it sort of like that was that was very interesting growing up s- um identifying as a feminist".

which the pain and shame of rape can be worked through, can be found or created.

Hoping with others

For all the womxn I spoke to, rape operated as an act of dismemberment, which cut them off from their bodies, their sense of themselves, as well as their relationships with others. The shaming and blaming, that they experienced made them feel in many moments that the rapes were their own fault. Yet, as I have shown above, the interview operated as a space in which they could re-member themselves, and tell different stories about the causes of their violations. In this way, the grip of the present was loosened (Eagleton, 2015) and a different future was made possible.

Camille²¹: as like women sharing information and sharing personal experience... [Rebecca: Mhmm] feel like that is you know like it's a really, it's a really important connection and it's a really important way of understanding our-ourselves through other people [Rebecca: Mhmm] and other people's experiences and that is like the essential humanity (Second interview, coffee shop, Cape Town, 22 May 2019).

Refiloe²²: And also as we're doing this interview you know I'm just sitting here thinking about it, as much as you're doing this interview to get like individual experiences and [inhales]... but you made me sort of like... I- I'm able to understand in the broader... social context [Rebecca: Mhm. Mhmm] You know [inhales] you know I-I'm able to sort of like from a moment stop saying 'me me me me me' [Rebecca: Mhmm] that this happened to me me me me [inhales] but also to understand it from a broader social perspective [Rebecca: Mhmm] that as much as this is my experience [inhales] but this is also your experience. This is something that we [inhales] we-we've gone through you know. It might have been at a different place, [Rebecca: Ja] at a different time but it somehow we share common experiences [Rebecca: Ja] and that's liberating [Rebecca: Ja]. For me I'm finding it very very liberating. I know that [inhales] now onwards I don't have to think about it as something that is shameful [Rebecca: Mhmm. Ja]. I don't have to think about it as something that is just an individual experience [Rebecca: Ja, that belongs to you. It doesn't belong to you] That is ja. [Inhales] Ja (First interview, hotel, Pretoria, 10 December 2018).

²¹ Camille described herself as: "Um I'm four percent South East Asian, according to 23andme, and like two percent African. So I'm like super white. And my family is like half Afrikaans, half English. I grew up speaking English, just [inhales] all the privilege, middle-class, private schools. Um... always just had... like a really [exhales]... I guess protected life but also like lots of opportunities, never doubted myself, never doubted my ability to do what I want. Um... very sexual and sexually active. I've slept with like 40 partners and sex is something that I really enjoy and you know have a good time with [...] I'm so straight [both laugh]"

²² Refiloe: "I'm the oldest child, which means I'm also the oldest um granddaughter. [Inhales] Er I was brought up by my grandparents in a very very very small village. But then er coz my parents has me when they were very young [laughs] [...] I'm currently doing my PhD in criminology [...] I identify as what a black female [...] I think middle-class ja. Middle-class ja [...] I date guys".

Here both Camille and Refiloe reflect on how, through sharing experiences of rape, these “individual” experiences of rape were re-conceptualised as fragments of a much broader social and political problem (Alcoff, 2018; van Schalkwyk, 2018). Camille reflects on how the sharing of experiences enables alternative humanising understandings of rape. As Refiloe reflects here, the sharing of experiences within the interview (in which both she and I shared aspects of our experience) allowed her to disrupt her own sense of individualised responsabilisation and shame for ‘having been raped’. These are examples of refusals of dominant understandings of rape. They show how sharing stories can provide opportunities for solidarity, which disrupts the alienation and isolation that rape produces (Padmanabhanunni & Edwards, 2016).

The interviews operated as a space in which my participants and I engaged in attempts to repair and extend our ‘worlds’ in hopeful ways (Fisher & Tronton, 1990). These are hopeful repairs and extensions in the face of dehumanisation and silencing. These are collective acts of “re-membering, practicing hopefulness that... reconfigur[e] possibilities for the future, finding possibilities to endure” (Flint, 2020, p. 59). This is reflected in my own sense of hope that remained in the wake of this research about rape. It was also reflected in other moments that extended beyond the research. After participating in the research project, Buhle contacted me to say she had established a space for womxn in her community to come together and share their experiences of rape. In our second interview, Tanya told me how, following our first interview, she spoke openly for the first time about her experience of rape in her church in the hope that this would disrupt the silence about rape in this space. These are acts of solidarity, which hope with others, in the face of denial, dismissal, silencing and shame. They demonstrate how hope is both constituted by and of the social.



“About a thousand women march against gender based violence in Cape Town, South Africa” on 1 August 2018. Photo by Ashraf Hendricks. © 2016-2020

GroundUp. 

<https://www.groundup.org.za/imagegallery/photo/1099/>

Conclusion

In proposing a socio-political conception of hope in the wake of rape, I have sought to situate hope within endemic sexual violence in South Africa. This conception of hope is an attempt to wrest hope from the narrow confines of mainstream psychology (Malherbe, 2022). Rather than reproducing a psychological conception of hope which responsabilises individuals to feel hopeful, promoting adjustment to the harmful conditions of present sexual violence, a critical, social-political conception of hope holds together moments of hopelessness, mourning, rage and refusal. This is a hope enmeshed with the hopelessness and pain of the present, without foreclosing the possibility of a less unequal, less unjust, less violent future (Thaler, 2019). This conception of hope recognises the ongoing struggle to ‘survive’ rape, amidst persistent victim-blaming, shaming and silencing. This conception of hope recognises that while the pain of rape may persist, womxn who have been raped are not ‘irreparably damaged’, fixed in positions of victimhood. As Laura Halperin (2015) powerfully writes:

hope exists in attempts at resistance, however futile these attempts may be or seem. It exists in the sharing of painful individual collective historias (histories and stories) and in the remembrance of harm in order to move past it and seek to rectify it. Remembering in these narratives doesn’t just consist of recollecting the

past; it entails recalling the past so as to remember it, giving it new shape in order to move forward towards a less harmful world” (pp. 3-4).

These are small, powerful acts of hope, which chip away at the isolation, shame, and pain in the wake of rape. This is a hope which refuses dominant narratives of rape, and through this refusal different possibilities of relating, both to the self and to others, are kindled. Through solidarity and hoping with and for others, the womxn I interviewed both demand and begin to construct a different future.

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Struggles, Visions, and Future Possibilities

The daily struggle for social change: Psychology as politics

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Abstract

In a country like Brazil, unequal and violent, Psychology assumes an inescapably political role in its production of knowledge and professional practice in different fields of activity. Psychology either organizes itself to contribute to social changes and questioning of individualistic theories or it develops theoretical contents and oppressive practices to contribute to producing suffering, remaining hegemonic, in harmony with the model of capitalist exploitation. The contrast between these positions is clear, especially when analysing the different positions expressed in scientific productions and technical references made available to Psychology professionals in the country. Understanding why people do not react collectively to the current threats and the destruction of public health, education, science, and technology policies facing the authoritarian project underway by the current government has been a very important ask in Psychology. This occurs precisely because psychological science still adheres to the dominant neoliberal ideas that produce trauma, disarticulate community groups and feed individualistic behaviours with the logic of care which insists on not realizing the fundamental role of economic and political organization in the production of suffering and illness. Based on critical psychology, this article demonstrates how Psychology is political, as a science and as a profession, that is, either in the elaboration of theories which corroborate liberal principles nor that contextualize the psychological phenomenon from a critical reading of capitalism. Psychology also manifests itself in practices that move towards conformism, adaptation and reproduction of social roles contributing to overcoming fatalism in its different dimensions. For democratization and community strengthening, it is necessary to understand suffering as political, facing adverse conditions. Psychology should be an instrument for promoting awareness, through the recuperation of historical memory and through action, through its collective and political impacts, through changes in individual behaviours and in overcoming psychosocial trauma. Psychology is always political in one direction or another; for this reason it is important to think about to whom it is serving as a science and a profession.

Keywords

community, ideology, liberation, political psychology

1.Introduction

Psychology as a profession was regulated in 1962, a time when Brazil went through a troubled political moment - a coup d'état was enacted in response to a popular and democratic government. A new professional training model was established with five-year regulated undergraduate courses. In sixty years of its regulation as a profession and science, psychology has undergone important changes, always related to the social and political conjuncture present at the historical moment.

This development of the discipline was strongly affected by the 1964 civil-military dictatorship, which had a great impact on the life of the Brazilian people with a dynamic of restrictions imposed on individual freedoms, on the right to information, and marked by violence, death, and disappearances. In vocational training courses, psychology was not unharmed. The restrictions involved access to knowledge in the field, especially from a more social and critical perspective. Professional practices and knowledge arising from diseases and mental disorders, conceived individually were prioritized through the surveillance of the faculty and curtailment of the right to student and professional organization. This led to a depoliticised, non-critical, mostly bourgeois profile that, although it recognized the limits of the profession to deal with social reality, reproduced in professional practice and its academic background an uncompromising and colonized attitude in the face of needed social change. A hegemonic psychology was taught and learned, which did not offer effective and radical possibilities for social change, did not respond to the contemporary demands and real living conditions of most of the Brazilian population, and did not engage with the specific Brazilian and Latin American context. Nevertheless, professionals who practiced in different fields of action and felt the distance between what was learned in undergraduate courses and the lived reality of their workspaces, began to mobilize, advocating for the necessary changes in public policies, especially in the training environment, reinforcing the commitment to human rights, to theoretical-methodological plurality, with human diversity, inclusion and ethical and scientific quality.

Brazil today has approximately 1075 training courses in psychology, according to the portal of the Brazilian Federal Psychology Council¹ and 425, 968 professionals, with very different characteristics and profiles, according to their training trajectories, highlighting the time when they graduated and the type of training institution. Psychology courses are, at present, offered mostly by private and religious institutions responsible for approximately 85% of trained professionals. Different training and professional practices occur in public institutions. With a progressive conception of the profession expressed in the national curriculum guidelines, but with a conservative training practice developed by university institutions, there is also the need to overcome the distance between what a political psychology could be and what, in fact, it mostly is when professionally practiced. We can understand this distance as the result of a conservative psychological science orientated to the demands of the

¹ <http://www2.cfp.org.br/infografico/quantos-somos/>

market which therefore does not engage in the critical, liberating and transforming formation of reality.

Our view is that fighting social inequalities is a political task for psychology. As Genaro (2022: 1)² notes, the abyss that separates the poor from the rich is the result of an economic system that, to concentrate resources in the hands of the few, must deepen the exploitation of the many anywhere on the globe. For this author, social inequality bothers those who point to capitalism as capable of providing for the well-being of all, so many aspects of social reality are obscured by naturalising the distance between rich and poor. The accommodation of most people and their inability to properly analyse the economic reality, which covers the determining role of social relations of production, diminishes the chance of enabling radical social changes. And that is why psychology can only contribute to needed social change when it is assumed that this field of knowledge and training must stop being an instrument for maintaining the *status quo* (Parker, 2009). This work has as its main objective to deepen the understanding of the history and role of psychology in Brazil, as well as glimpse the possibilities of a counter-hegemonic psychology in the face of the dismantling of science in the country with the rise of the far right and, consequently, with the deepening of inequality.

2. Psychology and the socio-economic context

We know that psychology as an autonomous science is born in a context of consolidating bourgeois society, responding and serving this process (e.g. Danziger, 1990³). Its foundations, in this sense, allude to the liberal ideological principles that are based on the notion of an autonomous individual, essentially free and responsible for her or his destiny. Its extensive historical contribution to processes of pathologizing, homogenization and segregation express well their theoretical and practical assimilation with these principles and the reproduction of the capitalist social order in Brazil and in the world.

This capitalist order, although hegemonically consolidated since the eighteenth century, has experienced, over time, moments of crisis, setbacks, and counter-offensives in its economic and social project. These different moments, in turn, impacted the theories and practices developed by psychology in the course of their history. Not by chance, revolutionary historical periods, marked by advances in class struggles, directly influenced the formulation of critical projects in psychology, which fought their individualizing, dehistoricizing and depoliticizing trends. The current historical moment, however, has been of the retreat of subaltern struggles, while the projects of structural social change and the advance of the offensive of capital have presented a new intensity.

² Genaro, E. Análise da Conjuntura - Desigualdade: quanto mais a escondem, mais aparece (18 de abril de 2022)

³ Danziger, K. (1990). *Constructing the subject: Historical origins of psychological research*. Cambridge University Press.

To understand how psychology has possibilities of either serving as a tool for maintenance or facilitating a rupture with the dominant social order, requires analyzing its links with this process, because it is through them that the psychosocial conditions, to which it is called to respond, are articulated. In this reflective effort, we need to analyze psychology's more general nexus with the process of capitalist social reproduction, as more specific to the current moment of crisis and neoliberal restructuring. By neoliberal restructuring, we refer to the economic and social process that has become widespread in the world, especially from the 1980s, which represented capital's response to its structural crisis, which began in the previous decade.

Appearing in the 1940s and made up of distinct intellectual currents, neoliberal theory gained greater relevance during the crisis and capitalist reorganization of the 1970s and 1980s. It was during this period that the first socioeconomic experiences inspired by the neoliberal think tanks were applied, first in Chile, during Augusto Pinochet's coup government and then in the United Kingdom and the United States, with the governments of Margaret Thatcher and Ronald Reagan, respectively. Despite the theoretical differences between their distinct currents and the geographical and temporal particularities of their experiences around the world, it can be said that neoliberalism has developed as a political-economic theory founded on the premise of the promotion of individual entrepreneurial freedoms and abilities, in the struggle against collectivism and in the alleged combat of state interventionism (Harvey, 2008).

As an economic and government experience, it developed based on the productive restructuring of post-crisis capital, leading to a large-scale privatization prescription in the world's central and subordinate countries, to the downsizing of the state in areas such as services of social welfare, the reduction of public spending, in part through the means of monetary policies, and the dismantling of social and labour rights (Antunes, 2009). The effects of these social and economic measures aided the reconfiguration of accumulation and capitalist expansion. Its impacts, however, are not restricted to the economic and social sphere, but they have decisive impacts in the reorganization of fields such as culture and production of subjectivity.

It is precisely in the context of neoliberalism that the ideological movement of propagating subjectivism and individualism is most intensified, with the liberal ideas of individual dignity and freedom, raised to become the central values of 'civilization'. Neoliberalism has consolidated its hegemony not only by applying an economic prescription and political and social measures, but also by the "conquest of hearts and minds", as expressed by Thatcher, incorporating itself into the ways of thought and "In the daily ways of many people interpret, live and understand the world" (Harvey, 2008, p. 04).

With neoliberalism, the hypertrophy of individual action could achieve its maximum development. An expression of this is in the widespread use of concepts such as "human capital" (Becker, 2009; Schultz, 1972), which moves to the individual sphere the mediation of the logic of the commodity that is inherent to the relationship between capital and labour. One of the most significant implications of this is the constant demand for self-valorization that is placed on

individuals who, converted into capital, are seen as rulers of themselves. In this conversion, which also makes the economy a personal discipline, to fulfil their interests, supposedly autonomous and free individuals are compelled to survive and act in an environment of amplified competition and fragile solidarity (Dardot & Laval, 2010).

This results in a new mode of subjectivation, where the logic of social and class conflicts is replaced by the rationality of self-management and the logic of individualization. Social issues come to be addressed in increasingly ideological terms (Dardot & Laval, 2010). An example of this is the space that notions such as risks and vulnerabilities (World Bank, 2001), multidimensional poverty (Sen, 2018) or resilience have gained as categories of psychosocial analysis, in a process that, to a greater or lesser extent, naturalises and removes discussion from the “social question”.

The material effects of capitalist social inequality, manifest in an increasingly intense manner in the daily life of large population masses around the world, are, within this logic, approached in an isolated and individualized way. It would not be about transforming economic and social conditions that produce inequality, risks, and vulnerabilities because these are ideologically viewed as inherent to the nature of human beings, their abilities and their personal choices. Thus, state intervention via policies to combat social inequality is increasingly replaced by policies focused on the rationality of individual management, the construction of active individuals and managers of their own risks (Dardot & Laval, 2010).

Through its development, not only as an economic program, but as a form of social engineering that profoundly affects the field of subjectivity production, neoliberalism has also forged new forms of psychosocial suffering and new policies to confront these sufferings. An articulation is established between the alienation of work and the alienation of the subjects of the real determinations of their suffering, that is quite functional to the dynamics of expansion of the logic of capital. This occurs as its fundamental ideological content does not seek to explain, but to mystify contradictory capitalist social relations, which is effective in the displacement of social class conflicts to the individual plane (Safatle, 2021).

Evidence of this, in the clinic field, as Safatle (2021) shows, was a profound reformulation of the grammar of psychic suffering in the third edition of the American (sic) Psychiatric Association's *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders* (DSM-III) in the 1970s. It rejected all psychodynamic diagnostic trends that were still present in the previous editions, supplanting them with overwhelmingly biomedical and behavioural criteria and emphasis on symptoms. This biological movement in psychiatry was reinforced with the publication of the subsequent editions of the manual, which further contributed to accentuating the neoliberal logic of individualization of psychic suffering in the field of discourse and *psi*.

Psychology, which makes up part of the knowledge and institutionality of this so-called psychological field (Parker, 2006), opens a new range of theoretical and practical problems. This is called upon to respond to the most diverse effects

of economic, political, social, and subjective transformations of this context. To the extent that neoliberalism is effective as a strategy that maximizes individualization in opposition to social and class conflicts, it is not surprising that individualizing and dehistoricizing perspectives gain so much space among psychological theories today.

Expression of this is the wide dissemination, in the last two decades in Brazil, of cognitive behavioural therapies, which are based on individual diagnostic premises, quite compatible with psychiatric references, and interventions focused on behavioural changes of the subjects. In their marriage to hegemonic psychiatry, these modalities of psychotherapy are also strengthening with the advent of neuroscientific research and the development of new antidepressants and other neurotransmitter regulators (Dunker, 2021).

This trend is also verified in the dissemination of psychological currents that supposedly developed against the pathologizing diagnosis of dominant psychiatry and its manuals. The so-called Positive Psychology, created in 2000 by the American psychologist Martin Seligman, is an example of this. Developed with the proposal to emphasize human qualities and virtues, not its negative and pathological aspects, positive psychology has gained significant space in the field of scientific research in psychology, where it could count on significant financial investments from large companies (Cabanas & Illouz, 2022).

In Brazil, an important expression of the approach to the premises of positive psychology has been taking place in the field of psychosocial work in communities (Gonçalves, 2020). Within the most widespread productions in the field in recent decades, it is possible to highlight a category that has acquired great centrality in community work in psychology in the country. This category is “community health”, which brings to the scope of these works an emphasis on “the empowering action of the individual and the community to care for its residents and the environment” (Góis, 2008, p. 104). As Gonçalves (2020) notes, the centrality acquired by this concept in community work in psychology in Brazil reveals the assimilation of the premises of positive psychology in the field, where the health (individual and collective) is prioritized as an axis of intervention, to the detriment of community psychosocial analysis articulated to social processes.

Whether in the field of clinical practice or in the field of psychosocial analysis, the precepts of this positive psychology have been showing their effectiveness and functionality to neoliberal ideology, especially from the accentuation of the capital crisis since 2008. Since this period, many countries have sought, in the indicators of happiness, references to the elaboration of policies to confront the effects of the real decline of the material conditions of life of their popular majorities. Research in positive psychology and its emphasis on psychological attributes and individual responsibilities have served as a basis for the application of public policies aimed at the development of “potential” and “human capacities”, to the detriment of policies intended for the confrontation of the material determinants of Social Inequalities (Cabanas & Illouz, 2022).

This attraction between psychological theories and practices and neoliberal assumptions, however, is not fortuitous. Although, historically, some of their

scientific perspectives have been striving to defend a posture of political neutrality of their agents and practices, we know that psychology, in their research and interventions, is political. Its models and concepts are theoretical responses to the psychosocial problems emerging from the inseparable relationship between individual and society, subjectivity and objectivity, in different political and historical contexts. The fact that this science, throughout its development, has formulated theories that served the maintenance of the capitalist social order through individualizing explanations of the social does not express an ethical or political deviation of its representatives. This is not a deviation, but the very nature of its foundations, which are the bourgeois ideological foundations of individual freedom, competition, and naturalization of the social. Thus, it is no coincidence that, in a context of generalization of neoliberalism as an economic, social, and cultural project, we are witnessing the growth of such psychologizing and dehistoricising trends in psychology, as the examples briefly mentioned here. These trends have been present in fields such as psychotherapies, but also in the field of community and public policy work (Gonçalves, 2020; Baima, 2019).

It is therefore of fundamental importance that, in order to glimpse paths to the construction of a psychology capable of contributing to demystification and breaking with the capitalist social order, we seek to anchor our analyses in other models and concepts. In models and concepts that operate in the opposite direction from individualisation, legitimization of competition, naturalization of social inequalities and the pathologisation of differences and resistances. May they operate as theoretical tools and practices of unveiling and changing social reality, contributing to the confrontation of fatalism, the strengthening of processes of resistance to neoliberal policies, and the construction of anticapitalist collective struggles.

3. Processes of change and the overcoming of fatalism

We have seen discussing that psychology is political and that it manifests itself in this direction as the product of capitalist society. Paradoxically, it can also manifest itself as an anti capitalist criticism and as a tool that contributes to overcoming liberal principles - the same ones that founded the science and psychological profession. It is this path against hegemony and overcoming the liberal way of life, that sustains critical psychologies⁴, and that, in this topic, becomes our object of reflection.

In this article, we have already dealt with the genesis of psychology as science and profession as it contributed - and continues to contribute - to the production of a conforming, competitive, individualistic, and meritocratic

⁴ We have already discussed on other occasions (Euzébios Filho & Gradella, 2020), that there is not only a theoretical and methodological affiliation committed to processes of social and economic changes. It is for this reason that we speak of Psychology('s) criticism(s). But there are undoubtedly ethical-political principles that unify them in a critical field, and they are: (1) Abandoning the political intentionality of social control and adaptations of dominant psychology; (2) Recognition of the need for overcoming the capitalist mode of sociability for the development of human potentialities

subjectivity, which pathologized not only the “different” but also those who promote counter-hegemonic alternatives.

Among the broad list of themes and challenges that critical psychologies are concerned with, we will now talk about some steps that could be taken by them to strengthen marginalized groups and for democratization of society.

Our choice, from among a number of possible theoretical frameworks, is that of liberation psychology, especially for the work of Ignacio Martín-Baró, since it makes an important contribution to identifying and reflecting on the psychosocial consequences of oppression (Martín-Baró, 1998). It would be the first step towards building a psychological praxis committed to social changes. A second step – as we will explore later in this text – would then demarcate conceptually what we mean by social change and the role of the psychologist within it.

Fatalism and the psychosocial dimension of oppression

To identify some aspects of the psychosocial dimension of oppression, we utilise the concept of fatalism (Martín-Baró, 1998). When thinking about the role of the psychologist in a process of social change, we have used the concept of conscientization of Paulo Freire (2001), who also advised Martín-Baró to think of a transformative psychological praxis (Martín-Baró, 1996).

According to Martín-Baró (1998), fatalism corresponds to the psychosocial dimension of the dominant ideology, which is understood as falseness of reality. In this conception, fatalism finds a practical purpose: the maintenance of the bonds of power inscribed in the processes of socialization of a conflicting class society, the capitalist society. It especially manifests itself in the family and social institutions, at school and at work. Thus, ideology can enter human groups, establishing mediations between particular individuals and the structures of society.

In general, fatalism manifests itself in individuals and groups as naturalization of social injustice and different power relations. It is the idea of fate, the impossibility of changing their own living conditions (Martín-Baró, 1998). It thus interferes with the elaboration of the past, in the absence of historical memory⁵, affecting the projection of the future. It is a condition of resignation about the future, an ignorance of the past, corresponding to the internalization of the conditions of oppression and exploitation.

Another aspect related to fatalism and observed by Martín-Baró (1998), is the bond between the lowering of future expectations and the depreciation of the image itself, the latter that manifests itself psychologically-especially in those subjects whose rights are daily denied, who live to survive, in the acceptance of fate or more specifically, in the shame of the class condition itself, in which case it may be an important component of what Gonçalves Filho (1999) described as the phenomenon of social humiliation.

⁵ Historical Memory is a concept coined by Martín-Baró to designate a historical reading of reality that can function as a strengthening element of groups in facing adversity conditions.

Fatalistic ideas are also manifest with a subject who does not recognize themselves worthy of a better life, a good job or even - in cases of extremely oppressive relationships - perhaps it was admissible not to be treated simply as human, with respect, attention, and caution. This is where it reveals an important aspect of fatalism (which, moreover, refers to the dialogue between Paulo Freire and Martín-Baró): the emotional dependence of the oppressed in relation to oppressors, manifested in a sense of worship and submission before the strongest, the victorious. The way of life of the oppressors, thus, becomes the parameter of self-image depreciation (Freire, 2001; Martín-Baró, 1998).

But despite fatalism being an indicator of asymmetry of social bonds, Martín-Baró (1998), more recent studies of the Brazilian reality (Cidade & Ximenes, 2012; Rosa, 2020; Euzébios Filho, 2022) confirm that it is also necessary to observe two aspects: (i) the adaptive character of fatalism; (ii) that it does not necessarily nullify the intentionality of the subject.

For an understanding of the adaptive character of fatalism as a psychological resource of adapting a certain condition of oppression, we can think of the binding between fatalism and psychosocial trauma which, according to Martín-Baró (2000a; 2000b), corresponds to a trauma caused by political violence, which materializes in the fragmentation of a social and community fabric that contributes to isolate people, fostering immediate and individualistic responses to problems whose context is the community.

However, if trauma manifests itself in an unbearable situation of oppression, often escaping psychological elaboration about what the individual and the group has been experiencing, the naturalization of bonds and power relations can be the only way to support relegation and social humiliation. This can often be indicated in the language and understanding that certain social bonds and institutions have of the fate of the popular classes: “God determines our destiny,” say certain religious institutions; “The boy should act as a boy and the girl as a girl,” is heard at school and in the family (Martín-Baró, 1998).

And thus, at the same time, the person’s psychological resources will be deformed to accept the relegation and submission before the victorious (since God wanted it so, etc.) and the self -image of the obedient subordinate, both being fed on the reproduction of desirable social roles for those who is at the top of the social pyramid. How could it not be political?

Regarding the fact that fatalism does not necessarily nullify an intentional action, we can give as an example the movements of social conservatism ongoing in the past and present, movements that correspond, among other aspects, to the active defence of hegemonic social roles (Pettigrew, 2016). We see, then, that there is conservative militancy (that is, a collective, organized, and intentional action) in defence of a naturalized understanding of power relations between genders, between rich and poor, etc. The phenomenon of the Brazilian far-right, for Euzébios Filho (2002), is an example of this he called reactionary fatalism.

We note, then, that fatalism does not manifest itself only as the absence of action or total acceptance of destination, but also as an adaptive resource, and it can also contain an intentional action of defence of a naturalized position within power relations.

Dialectic Fatalism/Awareness and the challenges of the psychologist

For Martín-Baró (1996) and Paulo Freire (2001), the process of awareness-raising (conscientização in Portuguese - “conscientisation”) represents, dialectically, the opposite direction of fatalism. As Moreira and Guzzo (2015) demonstrate, this dialectical understanding does not nullify the possibility of a limit situation⁶ (that unbearable, trauma promoter) boost a reverse process: awareness.

Before dealing, specifically, with the role of the psychological, it is necessary to briefly mention one aspect: in the dialectic between fatalism and awareness there is a conception of society with strong influence on critical thinking and Marxism. It is important to recognize that it is from this that Martín-Baró establishes ethical-political parameters to think of the psychologist's action (Blanco, 1998; Dobles, 2020).

In the classic manuscript *The role of the psychologist*, Martín-Baró (1996) drawing on Paulo Freire states that awareness corresponds to a process of decoding power relations, that is, the appreciation of the self-image of the oppressed, which occurs by the recovery of historical memory, the appreciation of culture and popular knowledge, overcoming class shame and social humiliation, etc.

On this basis, Martín-Baró (1996; 1998) argues that the role of the psychologist would be precisely to contribute to the tasks of breaking the emotional dependence of the oppressed and the decoding of relationships that produce injustice and social inequality. To this end, considering that this is a group task, the psychologist must assist in strengthening social and affective support networks, the development of class solidarity bonds and cooperative forms of conflict resolution.

The psychologist must also act, according to Martín-Baró, for articulation between biographical memory and collective memory, thus contributing to the feeling of communitarian belonging and grounding. She/he must also contribute to the elaboration of political trauma among other challenges that the author calls the “psychosocial task” (Martín-Baró, 2000).

It is necessary to understand that all these actions involve, of course, an effort to democratize relations and decision making (Freitas, 1998) - which reveals the importance of dialogue as a tool for social inclusion and promotion to spaces of participation and political representation (Freire, 2001). For Freire, dialogue is not just a conversation, but an ethical-political posture.

4. Psychology is political: Pathways for change

In his last course at Collège de France in 1984, Foucault (2014) discusses the concept of *parresía* (παρησία), that is, to use his definition, the courage of truth. It

⁶ A limit-situation is a historical condition that prevents people from having freedom. Any limit-situation implies that some groups of people will benefit from it, while other people will be harmed.” <https://www.litcharts.com/lit/pedagogy-of-the-oppressed/terms/>

was not, at the time, to glimpse the truth as something simple and crystallized, but especially the action made[?] fearless by its search and exposure. To this end, Foucault analyzes some works of western philosophy from the Ancient period to the Middle Ages, with particular emphasis on the tradition of the Cynics in philosophy and the figure of Diogenes de Sinope (404 and 412 BC), not only for its influence on cynicism as a philosophical perspective, and stoicism, but also for wandering the streets of Greek cities seeking to carry what he considered the minimum necessary for his survival, sleeping, for example, in a barrel, something that, as Foucault characterizes (*ibid*, p. 209) refers to a principle of cynicism: in the face of the practice of *parresia* and the need to “occupy itself”, one must seek by philosophy a “preparation for life”. That is, in short, in Foucault's understanding, the courage of truth also refers to a freer way to live, with respect to ties with other humans, probably not very receptive to inconvenient truths, and to the material possessions that could make us prisoners of petty needs.

This is not an example at random. Interestingly, hegemonic medicine used the life of Diogenes to pathologize a certain set of behaviors. The “Diogenes Syndrome”-a term coined by Clarke et al (1975) in one of the world's leading medical scientific journals, *The Lancet* according to Stumpf and Rocha (2010, p. 156), “characterized by an extreme carelessness with personal hygiene, negligence with the cleanliness of their own housing, social isolation, suspicion and paranoid behavior, and the occurrence of collecting”. In this case, it is not only a rough reading of the life and philosophy of Diogenes or an inability to those who propose and defend the existence of this syndrome in understanding the reality of life of the subjects in the face of their objective and subjective conditions of life, but of the patent and essential reconfiguration of the content in an “ideological form”.

If we really want to counter hegemonic psychology in a class society, even more in a context of extreme individualism imposed by neoliberalism, “seeking the truth” requires more than a “preparation for life”. This is not an option. That is, the more we practice *parresia* in a political and economic system based on the distortion of reality, the closer we are to living in a barrel. This is clearly reflected, especially in Latin America, in the lack of funding for really critical research, especially in humanities, and in an “epistemic injustice”, rescuing the concept elaborated by Fricker (2007), which gives the poorest countries only the role of location for field studies in the production of scientific knowledge, culminating in what Spivak (1994) called “epistemic violence”, the colonizing imposition of the predominantly male hegemonic intellectual production of the richest countries that deeply contributes not only to the discredit of scientists from the “peripheries of the world”, but for the silencing of the “subordinate subject” - and, more specifically, of the “subordinate woman”.

With rare exceptions, due to the strengthening of neoliberalism and the far right around the world, psychology in Brazil is even more impregnated with epistemological subordination. And this is directly reflected in the strength that the main hegemonic, conservative or reactionary currents have not only in the clinic, but in all areas where psychology has historically acted in the last decades, especially education. If, for example, the ideal of intellectual emancipation has

become, inspired by the French Republican School, fundamental to the educational proposals of the twentieth century in Brazil, now we have the goal in public policies, as well as in many other countries, especially the “common national base Curriculum”(BNCC, 2017) and the discourse of entrepreneurs who are increasingly appropriating Brazilian education, which hegemonic psychology calls “socio-emotional skills” and their derivations from Gardner's work (1995, 1996). This label itself, devoid of any scientific reality, demonstrates not only that there is not, in fact, the least political and economic interest in promoting any kind of emancipation, whether objective or subjective, but that hegemonic psychology in neoliberalism will individualize, to the maximum, human issues and place further responsibility on subjects for their successes and failures.

If hegemonic psychology is historically marked by reducing “complex relations between humans to the world of ideas and linear causality” (Schraube & Sørensen, 2013, p. 3) and thus promote “strategies to persuade the oppressed that their own problems are, in reality, only deep psychological problems”(Parker, 2007, p. 199), then, a psychology that is just “criticism” is insufficient, rather like trying, for example, to produce a “Kritik der Kritischen Kritik”, as suggest and mocked Marx and Engels in the original title of “Die Heilige Familie”, 1844. It is necessary to make a psychology that *confronts* hegemony, which exposes the contradictions of our political and economic organization, a counter-hegemonic psychology that collaborates, necessarily, for the process of emancipation (political, intellectual, affective) of the subjects in the sense of a real transformation of the world. According to Martín-Baró, psychology also needs to emancipate itself.

This emancipation must occur with the breaking not only of its historic and close relationship with capitalism, but also the crystallized forms of acting centralized in vertical relations. In this sense, a more egalitarian and democratic position between the research subject and the research subject eventually becomes the first point of inflection. Agreeing with Parker (2007), psychology, and any other science that intends to be counter-hegemonic, must be defeated as a discipline-power. And this not only in the relationship of psychologists with the research field, but with the colonizing theoretical references that feed on the patriarchal-capitalist ideology. It is important, thus, even if bourgeois hegemonic psychology is centred on the study of psychological phenomena exclusively at the individual level, that counter-hegemonic psychology does not despise the aspects of individuality and guiding itself for a praxis capable of collaborating in the promotion of human capacity of self-transformation and the world.

The perspective we bring here from historical and dialectical materialism, unlike strictly economic Marxist tradition, seeks to reiterate that we are historical subjects and thus exercises a protagonism in the transformations of social life. That is, agreeing with Eagleton (2017, p. 27), by defining the subjects as “historical” we are stating that “we are constitutively capable of self-transcendence (...)”. Thus, we established here that even in the face of powerful structural, political, economic and ideological factors that there is a margin, even apparently small in certain cases, to go beyond. Collaborating in promoting the movement of this power inherent to the human is one of the most important tasks

of counter-hegemonic psychology. It is not just about whether or not to defend the revolutionary process as a subjective process, but understanding and defense – otherwise our work would make no difference – from the protagonism of the subjects in historical events. Thus, we must be vigilant and always suspect the idea that there is no intimate relationship between superstructure and infrastructure, that objective conditions unilaterally determine subjective conditions. The method of historical and dialectical materialism does not only analyze economic, political, ideological and institutional aspects, but also the relevance of the subjects in history.

Therefore, the task of always advancing in the concepts we use from the possibilities of contribution of psychology is essential. That is, no matter how obvious, it is not enough to employ philosophical, sociological, anthropological, economic, etc. concepts, without an analysis of reality, relevance and weaknesses of this concept in the light of our knowledge area. As much as it is desired that scientific knowledge becomes more accessible and conceptual, superficiality should never dictate the *modus operandi* of the sciences. To do science against hegemony is also to explore and confront the words we use so much, because treating concepts without the proper depth does not mean making a certain more “palatable” knowledge. Quite the contrary, acting in this way will only demonstrate the possible weaknesses of our work, the inconsistencies and contradictions of what we think and publish. Superficiality is a task of hegemony.

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Abolition Psychology: Principles for a decolonial liberation psychology *hacia El Mundo Zurdo*

Jesica Siham Fernández¹

Abstract

Abolition is the eradication or elimination of conditions and circumstances that encroach our humanity, and our more than human relationships. To be free is to live with dignity, and abolition as freedom is to experience relational wellbeing, intergenerational healing, and collective thriving (Davis et al., 2021). In this paper, I define *abolition psychology* as a set of principles—*theory in the flesh*, *research justice*, and *decolonial love*—that can help actualize decoloniality and liberation. Abolition as a movement, acts to address, transform, and eradicate hegemonic forms of power that are necessary for decolonial liberation. To advance decolonial liberation, psychology must engage abolition to disrupt the coloniality of power entrenched in systems of oppression. Thus, three abolition principles are described in relation to case study examples aligned with radical hope and imagining *otherwise* toward what Gloria E. Anzaldúa (1981) names as *El Mundo Zurdo*—a liberated world, one where we all co-exist. Abolition psychology as principles of *theory in the flesh*, *research justice* and *decolonial love* help foster a decolonial process to cultivate and sustain a disciplinary shift in pursuit of and for liberation.

Keywords

abolition, critical psychology, liberation psychology, decoloniality

Can a psychology grounded in Western/Eurocentric epistemologies actualize emancipatory conditions of transformative justice, decoloniality, intergenerational healing, and liberation? How can critical psychology and allied psychologies committed to disrupting oppressive systems of power re-center its

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pulse—or heart—while interrupting the machinations of a discipline that has colluded to maintain whiteness, patriarchy and capitalism, and preserve the *status quo*? Is *abolition psychology*, or a psychology *of* and *for* decolonial liberation possible? As complex and nuanced as these questions may seem, they aim to animate a critically reflexive process of bringing into fruition what I characterize as abolition psychology. Expanding on the themes of the special issue on the politics of psychology, or “critical psychology by any means necessary,” I offer a reflection on three interconnected principles to encourage critical psychologists and allied practitioners to consider abolition as necessary paradigm to actualize what Anzaldúa (1981) describes as a place-space where we all fit: *El Mundo Zurdo* (e.g., Left Handed World). Abolition is being and existing in *El Mundo Zurdo*. It is a world with many worlds² where we are *de corazón a corazón* and *mano a mano* (heart to heart, hand in hand) collaborating toward transformative justice that brews decolonial liberation.

Situating this piece in conversation with writings on the *decolonial turn* (Maldonado-Torres, 2017), and disciplinary interventions aimed to disrupt the coloniality of power in psychology (Malherbe, Ratele, Adams, Reddy, & Suffla, 2021; Macleod, Bhatia, & Liu, 2020), I offer an opening reflection on how/where I am located. In Western contexts, most notably in the United States, psychology and psychological inquiry has often served to affirm and reify hegemonic discourses about communities often without them knowing or having a say in how these discourses circulate and impact their lives. The politics and polity of psychology is still tethered to whiteness, coloniality and positivism, as well as *apolitical* theories, research and practice. Community psychology in the U.S. is slowly shifting away from the Eurocentrism that heavily shaped the discipline, yet these transformations are rather noted at the micro-level of individual interventions, frameworks and discourses. The politics of U.S.-based psychology must be troubled and contested if the discipline is to actualize its purpose to support community struggles for transformative justice, and intergenerational healing. Psychology must align its theories, research and practice with abolition, which scholar-activist-healer adrienne maree brown describes as “a future in which we all know we can belong, be human, and be held” (brown, 2020, p. 1). That is, where systems, institutions, relationships, and ways of being are life-affirming, sustainable, and aligned with equity, justice, emancipation, and sovereignty.

Abolition is a word that in popular culture and public discourse has come to mean different things. With the rise of social movements and hashtag-activism, abolition has made its way into varied forms of media, from calls for the abolition of police, prisons, and detention centers, to the disavowal of intersecting institutions or policies that sustain the carceral state (Klukoff et al., 2021). Abolition is active, not theoretical, symbolic, or metaphorical. It is enacting a set of principles—attitudes, actions, and relationships, coalitions or

² Anzaldúa’s characterization of *El Mundo Zurdo* holds resonance with Zapatismo, or Zapatista ideologies that purport the construction of a “world where many worlds fit” (*un mundo donde quepan muchos mundos*). That is, where Indigenous autonomy, sovereignty and dignity are affirmed—and in relational co-existence with multiple communities and cosmovisions toward the viability of pluriversality (Ciofalo, 2022).

movements aligned with liberation, and a decolonial acknowledgement of our co-existence and interdependence with all beings (Davis et al., 2021). Abolition is a verb - it is active. Enacting and embodying abolition means cultivating and sustaining the dignity, thriving and sovereignty of all beings in moments and movements of struggle. By outlining the principles that comprise what I describe as abolition psychology this proposal invites psychology, and psychologists to (re)imagine the discipline—the critical, liberation, community, and allied psychologies. By highlighting three abolition principles I am responding to calls to engage with abolitionist practices (Klukoff et al., 2021), as well as two themes of the special issue. First, mainstream psychology often structures academic and scholarly inquiries, as well as dominant frameworks that overlook the significance of experiential knowledge. Second, quotidian activities, such as reflection and relationality, can provide the basis for resistance to contemporary disciplinary regimes or epistemic forms of psychological violence. Thus, attending to our everyday subjectivities or ways of knowing, and framing these as lived psychologies is necessary.

Abolition principles that are aligned with decolonization and liberation are imperatives toward an ethic of love, wellbeing and healing. My intentions, therefore, are to offer a reflection on the importance of abolition in psychology. Abolition psychology as decolonization and liberation is grounded in principles of *theory in the flesh*, *research justice* and *decolonial love*. *Decolonial love* is characterized as free expression or an embodied enactment of affect that is distinct from sociocultural constructions of love or expectations of performative care. Unlike transactional individualized notions of love, *decolonial love* acts/actions are unconventional expressions of authentic care, connection, mutuality and relationality (Figueroa, 2015; Maldonado-Torres, 2007, 2020; Sandoval, 2000). I engage with these principles to surface the implications and possibilities of abolition psychology with/in communities. I define abolition psychology as decoloniality and liberation that moves beyond critique to carve a path toward *El Mundo Zurdo* where transformative justice, healing and pluriversality³ are possible.

Abolition psychology is oriented toward decolonial liberation that encompasses transformation. My proposal for an abolition psychology aligns with Davis et al (2022), brown (2020), Anzaldúa (1987), among other decolonial feminist scholars (Anzaldúa & Morraja, 1981; Figueroa, 2015; Lugones, 2003; Maldonado-Torres, 2008; Sandoval, 2000; Smith, 2012; Tuck, McKenzie, & McCoy, 2014), as well as critical community psychologists rooted in the Majority World (Atallah & Dutta, 2022; Boonzaier & Niekerk, 2019; Ciofalo, 2022; Domínguez, 2022; Dutta, 2021; Dutta, Azad, & Hussain, 2021; Fernández,

³ Pluriversality is an ontological and epistemological way of understanding the world, and the conditions by which we come to know and understand what and how we know, or construct knowledge. In the words of Escobar (2016), “the pluriverse is a way of looking at reality that contrasts with a “One-World” World assumption that there is a single reality to which there corresponds multiple cultures, perspectives, or subjective interpretations” (p. 22) In other words, that there are multiple ways of knowing, or realities, and that no one view is an absolute truth. Furthermore, “the pluriverse is a tool to first, make alternative to the one world plausible to one-worlders, and, second, provide resonance to those other words that interrupt the one-world story” (p. 22), thereby nuancing the dualistic, binaries of knowledge production and existence.

Sonn, Carolissen, & Stevens, 2021; Fernández, 2022; Kessi, Suffla, & Seedat, 2021; Lau, 2017; Montero, 2007; Montero, Sonn, Burton, 2017; Pillay, 2017; Silva, Fernández, & Nguyen, 2021; Sonn & Stevens, 2021). With these intentions, I invite psychologists to imagine, envision and ideate a psychology grounded in abolition that while critical it is also decolonial and liberatory. To begin, I briefly describe links between critical and liberation psychologies, and how these align with abolition. Next, I characterize elements of critical psychology that reflect abolition principles toward the formation of *El Mundo Zurdo*, or the place-space where relationships of emancipation from the coloniality of power are possible. Finally, I outline three principles of abolition psychology—*theory in the flesh*, *research justice* and *decolonial love*. I conclude with few reflections on how to advance emancipatory transformative justice praxes that strive for dignity, wellbeing and sustainability.

Threading Critical, Decolonial and Liberation Psychologies

Critical psychology is a constructivist, political and sociologically oriented paradigm. Centered in a critique of positivism and neoliberalism, critical psychology is oriented toward a Marxist approach. In relation to liberation, critical psychology notes the importance of historic and contemporary sociopolitical contexts in shaping individual and collective action across multiple systems (Burton & Kagan, 2005; Montero, 2007). Critical psychology in the U.S. emerged amidst a crisis of civil and human rights violations. Transgressions on people's rights led to questioning the significance and value of psychology as a discipline to address systemic injustices (Burton & Ordóñez, 2015). Critical psychology was thus a response and mode of resistance to the empiricism, positivism, and Eurocentrism of a seemingly *apolitical* discipline.

Noting the limitations of psychology, and its complicity with the *status quo*, critical psychology was conceived to address three issues or limitations. First, the discipline was seen as irrelevant and holding little value for addressing concrete social problems locally, nationally, and globally. Second, psychology was detached from the real-life circumstances or conditions that were impacting communities and society. Knowledge was produced or generated in seemingly artificial or simulated contexts where communities were being observed through what can be described as a settler colonial gaze. Third, in attempting to present itself as a legitimate science, psychology purported being unbiased, objective, and neutral—an *apolitical* preference that has remained (Burton, 2004). The result has led to a psychology that is devoid of disciplinary critique, lacks processes of accountability for its contributions and complicity in systems of power, and has superficially acknowledged the histories of coloniality that created systemic injustices in the first place (Roberts, 2022; Roberts, Bareket-Shavit, Dollins, Goldie, & Mortenson, 2020). Some of these limitations are still applicable, and merit further interrogation.

Relatedly, another characteristic of critical psychology is its capacity to simultaneously hold critique alongside possibility, or to exist within the

complexities of refusal, resistance, radical hope, and imagination of what could be. Generating value-free inquiry that is detached from the political subjectivities of the researcher-practitioner is not a goal of critical psychology. On the contrary, critical psychology is oriented toward addressing the “very conflictual realities of the social world” that is oriented toward social critique (Batur et al., 2019). The critique centers on the social conditions of life that reproduce hierarchies of power and oppression via discourses, ideologies, policies, and practices. Expanding upon these characteristics, another aspect of critical psychology is to transform, reimagine, and co-construct psychological theories, methods, and research paradigms (Batur et al., 2019, p. 6). Critical psychology, although rooted in critique, also develops “a new, critical, situated, and socially embodied conception of psychology” (Batur et al., 2019, p. 6). Relating to liberation, critical psychology paradigmatically shifts away from positivism, individualism, deficit-based, and pathologizing/medicalizing interventions, whilst trying to understand the everyday conditions that impact communities. Yet among some liberation psychologists critical psychology remains limited in its scope because of its Eurocentrism, and application in Westernized contexts (Ciofalo, 2022; Montero, Sonn, & Burton, 2017). Although critical psychology strives for a psychology *of* and *for* liberation *by* and *with* communities it falls short of actualizing its purpose.

Moving beyond the critique of traditional psychology and psychological perspectives, Comas-Díaz and Torres Rivera (2020) expand upon Martín-Baró’s (1994) definition of liberation psychology as the use of psychological approaches to understand and address oppression among individuals and groups. Drawing attention to the role of psychologists, a liberation-orientation purports that we must embody decolonial accountability to communities on the margins. As allies and accomplices with communities who are change agents, psychologists must “anchor their knowledge in *vivencia* (lived experience), *lo cotidiano* (everyday reality), and the recovery of historical memory of oppressed individuals and communities” (Comas-Díaz & Torres Rivera, 2020, p. 8) with the aim of actualizing transformative justice and intergenerational healing—key characteristics of *El Mundo Zurdo*. To redress suffering and systemic injustices, psychologists must engage in actions that strengthen, uplift, and sustain communities, whilst co-creating conditions that affirm their power. This conceptualization of liberation psychology bridges a critical intersectional perspective (Comas-Díaz, Hall, & Neville, 2019; Neville et al., 2021) with a decolonial standpoint (Reyes Cruz & Sonn, 2011) toward abolition where justice is not predicated on the duality or dialectics of injustice, scarcity and precarity. Instead, liberation is abolition, abolition is justice, and justice is an affirmation of our coexistence to thrive.

The emancipatory nature of critical and liberation psychologies resembles a decolonial standpoint that moves beyond critique toward imagination, action, and transformation (Bell, 2022; Bell, Canham, Dutta, & Fernández, 2020). Liberation, like critical psychology, is an oppositional psychology to the instrumentalization of scientific theories or paradigms that limit possibilities to *be/become*. Instead of testing theories the focus is on creativity, transformation,

and healing. Thus, reflecting on the writings of Martín-Baró (1994) that were largely informed by Freire's (1970) existential necessity for liberation, Montero and colleagues (2017) propose four pillars for a liberation-oriented psychology. Inclusive of critique, the four pillars serve as a prescription for abolition. The first pillar is disillusionment with psychology's Eurocentric perspective. Second, reactive critical engagement that aims to disrupt hegemonic psychological research and theories. Third, re-constructing psychology via inclusion of silenced perspectives and of groups on the margins. And lastly, emancipatory conditions, which align with abolition. Critical community psychologists describe these pillars also in relation to a decolonial standpoint (Reyes Cruz & Sonn, 2011), constellations of co-resistance (Atallah & Dutta, 2022; Atallah et al., 2022), *conocimiento* (Fernández, under review), pluriversality (Beshara, 2021; Ciofalo, 2022; Pickren, 2021; Seedat & Suffla, 2017) and relationality (Dutta, 2021; Fernández et al., 2022). Abolition psychology specifically aligns with the fourth pillar as it exemplifies *El Mundo Zurdo*.

The decolonial critique and criticality that are central to liberation psychology allows for the interrogation of what is conceived as natural, normal, and static. Yet, because theory and critique are limited or can only achieve so much, abolition is essential to transformation. Given the definitions of critical and liberation psychologies, the decolonial standpoint emerging within the discipline, and the four pillars outlined, I offer three interconnected abolition principles: *theory in the flesh*, *research justice* and *decolonial love*. To illustrate that abolition psychology is possible, I describe these principles via examples of my work with college students, middle school aged youth, and Mexican immigrant mothers. The intent is to offer perspectives on critical, decolonial and liberation psychologies *of/for* abolition. Liberation as emancipation is the eradication of oppression, which materializes as an end to suffering. Thus, liberation is transformative, emancipatory, and the recovery of historical memory to heal (Martín-Baró, 1994; Montero, 2007; Montero, Sonn, & Burton, 2017; Neville et al., 2021). Ending suffering is not a naïve desire; liberation can and must be actualized through abolition principles as praxes unshackled from colonial power. Liberation is a constant struggle to transform circumstances for the better so that we may experience decolonial liberation as existence in *El Mundo Zurdo*.

Abolition Feminism as Decolonial Liberation

Abolition psychology is a set of interconnected principles that support the creation-ideation of *El Mundo Zurdo*. Decolonial liberation is and exists via the relational experiences where we know and feel that we belong truly and fully. Since the publication of Davis' (2003) *Are Prisons Obsolete?* abolitionist movements to dismantle the carceral state have become commonplace. The Black Lives Matter movement, along with the activism of Dreamers advocating for comprehensive immigration reform, have expanded notions of abolition to include the elimination of institutions, policies, and discourses that reproduce

violence, injustices, and intergenerational trauma (Domínguez, 2022). Black Lives Matter demands the abolition of racialized policing (Klukoff et al., 2021; Phelps, Ward, & Frazier, 2021), while Dreamers call for an end to anti-immigration policies, legislation, and discourses that materialize as crimmigration (Jean-Charles, 2021). Abolition movements have a principle in common: to affirm human dignity in pursuit of liberation via the eradication of systems of hegemonic power.

In resonance with a conceptualization of abolition as decolonization, Davis et al (2022) propose *abolition feminism*. Abolition urges and encourages resistance and refusal to myopic or individual conceits; it shifts its focus to draw attention to systemic conditions that reify and reflect broader social problems. Abolition feminism allows people to render visible threats to safety and freedom that would not be so obvious when considered independently or in isolation from larger socio-structural conditions. As a relational movement, abolition feminism embraces multiplicity and a pluriversality of theories of change and liberation (Domínguez, 2022) that involved accompaniment, accountability and fostering other ways of being, not in isolation but *in* and *with* communities relationally situated and implicated in decolonial liberation struggles.

As a movement or emergent strategy (brown, 2020), abolition is a theory of change, a philosophy, and a tradition of resistance as productive purposeful tension; a form of refusal that holds onto radical hope alongside the forging of what is perceived as unimaginable yet can be. Abolition is a principle that must be put into practice; it must be embodied and enacted in ways of living, being and doing that interrupt, refuse, resist, reimagine, and act against systems of violence that diminish our human and more than human relationships. Abolition is a movement that is constantly evolving to tip the scales of injustice toward feminist, decolonial, liberatory conditions (Domínguez, 2022; Gilmore, 2007). The restituting of accountability to coexist, requires enacting abolition principles to co-create a life of dignity, thriving and healing—which Anzaldúa (1981) describes as *El Mundo Zurdo* or an decolonial liberated world where we all fit.

Characterizing *El Mundo Zurdo*

In envisioning a world of decolonial liberation for groups on the margins, Anzaldúa (1981) coined *El Mundo Zurdo* as a place-space of alliances built on relational differences. As a metaphor for a world where Majority World communities are acknowledged and embraced as they are, *El Mundo Zurdo* fosters possibilities for abolition delinked from colonial power. As a co-existence devoid of fragmentation, Anzaldúa describes *El Mundo Zurdo* as the place where:

We are the queer groups, the people that don't belong anywhere, not in the dominant world nor completely within our own respective cultures. Combined we cover so many oppressions. But the overwhelming oppression is the collective fact that we do not fit, and because we do not fit, we are a threat. Not all of us have the same oppressions, but we empathize and identify with each other's

oppressions. We do not have the same ideology, nor do we derive similar solutions. Some of us are leftists, some of us practitioners of magic. Some of us are both. But these different affinities are not opposed to each other. In *El Mundo Zurdo*, I with my own affinities and my people with theirs can live together and transform the planet. (p. 209)

As described, it is a new world with a different set of relationships and ways of being that sustain abolition. According to Anzaldúa (1981), *El Mundo Zurdo* is “a two-way movement—a going deep into the self and an expanding out into the world, a simultaneous recreation of the self and a reconstruction of a society” (p. 208). The proposal for an abolition psychology is to actualize *El Mundo Zurdo* where coalitions across differences, and radical dreams are possible possibilities.

In *El Mundo Zurdo* decolonial liberation as abolition is strived for because it is “where people from diverse backgrounds with diverse needs and concerns coexist and work together to bring about revolutionary change” (as cited in Keating, 2009, p. 321). In other words, in *El Mundo Zurdo* there is a commitment to the everydayness of coexisting as people with diverse realities (Henderson-Espinoza, 2013, p. 116). *El Mundo Zurdo* reflects our inclusivity of differences, the holding of complexities in distinct lived experiences and positionalities, that together move toward decolonial liberation. Because *El Mundo Zurdo* is necessary, I offer three abolition psychology principles. I humbly offer these principles to psychologists, and psychology as a discipline with the intent to help us transverse oppression and critique in pursuit of abolition as decolonial liberation. An openness to complexity and imagination is thus necessary as we walk a path toward abolition where *El Mundo Zurdo* is a possibility rather than a vision.

Three Principles for an Abolition Psychology

Abolition is intentional and actionable rather than passive. Because abolition is liberatory, decolonial, feminist and transformative, paradigms rooted in embodiment (*theory in the flesh*), epistemic justice (*research justice*) and relationality (*decolonial love*) are needed. The three abolition principles I offer are interconnected, and characterized by *theory in the flesh*, *research justice* and *decolonial love*, which I illustrate via reflections from my work with college students, middle school aged youth, and a group of immigrant Mexican mothers. A decolonial liberation psychology oriented *hacia El Mundo Zurdo* is anchored in these abolition principles.

Theory in the Flesh: A First-Year College Student Seminar

As a faculty member I strive to challenge both the implicit and explicit institutionalized forms of discrimination and *othering* that some students experience. *Theory in the flesh* in the university context reflects my embodied critical reflexivity on dynamics of power between students and university

administrators. Students often perceive faculty as holding status or power, and while some do the influence some faculty hold is limited by their positionalities. In my case, it is shaped by who I am and what I look like, and my standing as a pre-tenure faculty. *Theory in the flesh* is the experience of engaging in an embodied ethical critical reflexivity that is attuned to dynamics of differential power, privilege and positionality within contexts and relationships. That is, a process by which awareness of how the personal becomes entangled with the political, as well as the body and affect. According to Moraga (1981) *theory in the flesh* “means where the physical realities of our lives—our skin color, the land or concrete we grew up on, the sexual longings—all fuse to create a politic born out of necessity. Here, we attempt to bridge the contradictions of our experiences ... we do this bridging by naming ourselves and by telling our stories” (p. 23). Embodiment serves as a source of knowledge where experiences, memories, and hope are possible. In prior work, I describe *theory in the flesh* as an ethical critical reflexivity, a subjective encounter, where “tensions, bridging, and contrapuntal experiences, as well as process of critical reflexivity” (Fernández, 2018) that move within the body.

To demonstrate the principle of *theory in the flesh* I offer reflections from a five-week seminar called *Imagining the New University* with first year college students. Through this case study I illustrate how *theory in the flesh* was embodied, and facilitated among students to affirm their knowledge and hopes, as we troubled the university’s discourses on equity and inclusion. The seminar was offered in winter 2022 and it was co-taught with a university administrator engaged in diversity affairs. The motivation for such seminars was to help build community; however our seminar also focused on the history of student activism and social movements in the Greater Bay Area, whilst re-centering student organizing within our specific university context.

The history of social movements and civil rights struggles in the Bay Area, which are often associated with San Francisco and Oakland, also has a place in San José. Making visible these historic links inspired the seminar’s goals, and was noted in the course description:

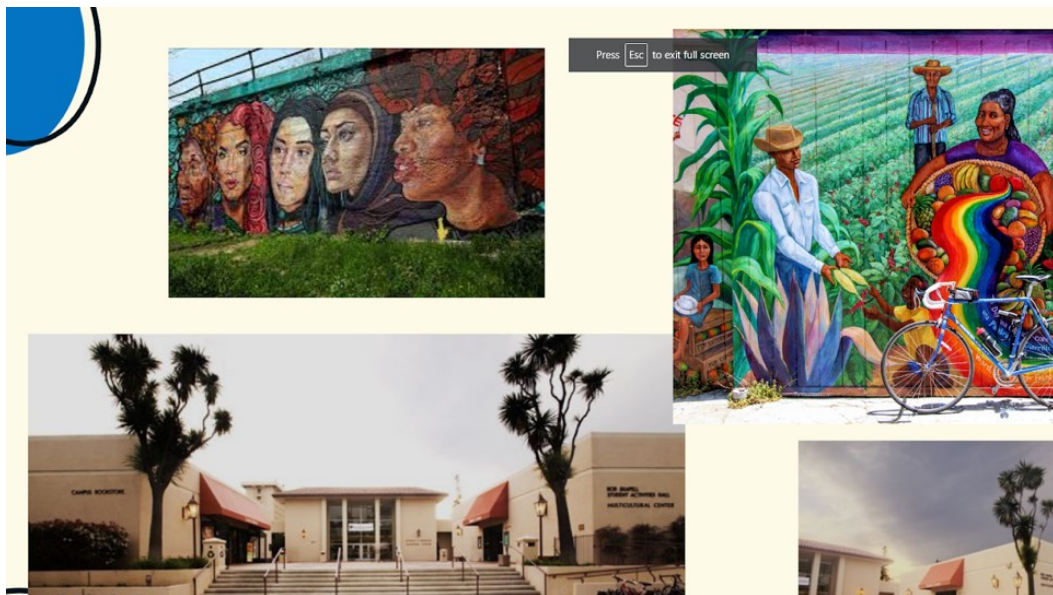
In 1968, the Third World Liberation Front (TWLF), composed of student activists in San Francisco, Berkeley, and the Greater Bay Area, came together to organize a movement to decolonize the university. Today, decades later, students continue to advocate for diversity, equity, inclusion, voice, and representation in higher education. In this seminar we will engage with these histories, as well as the contemporary experiences of student organizers and activists. Together, and in community, we will imagine the New University, engage radical hope, and pursue opportunities for solidarity-in-action to create a more just and inclusive SCU.

Students in the *Imagining the New University* seminar engaged a sociohistorical analysis and critical reflexivity of the past through readings and archival materials that helped them contextualize activism and organizing in relation to the present. By comparing contemporary student activism and social movements within and beyond our university, and in relation to the 1968 Third World Liberation Front, we discussed transformation at multiple levels of

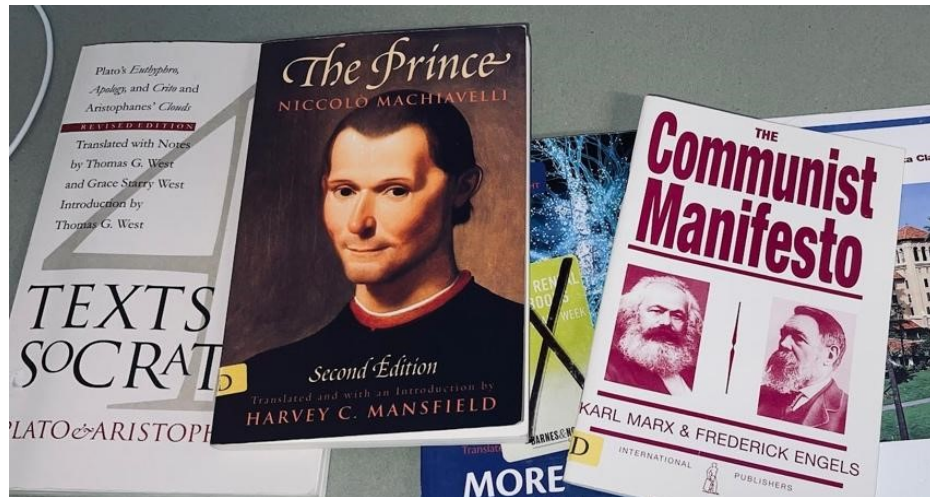
analysis. We grounded our understandings of transformative justice and institutional change in Bolman and Deals (2013) four-frame model of organizational change, as well as la paperson's (2017) proposal for the *Third University* that aligned with Anzaldúa's (1981) vision of *El Mundo Zurdo*.

Through reflexivity and dialogues anchored in their experiences as students of color, students of marginalized genders, and undocumented or mixed-status students, we facilitated the abolition principle of *theory in the flesh*. Specifically, we described what it feels to belong, to be seen/unseen, heard/silenced and/or misrecognized/othered within the university. We formed connections by sharing moments when we felt othered, where we differed in our experiences, yet held space for care and healing among us. We engaged in reciprocal recognitions where rather than seeing each other as students or instructors, we acknowledged our complex personhood within communities and histories beyond the university. The moments of silence in our seminar allowed us to process our feelings, and the sensations that moved through our body.

One of the activities that we engaged in the seminar was the *By Us, For Us: Photo-Narrative Exhibit*, which helped students imagine a more affirming and inclusive campus. The activity sparked students to respond to some of the reflections, or photo-narratives, featured in the exhibit. To do so, we collaboratively developed prompts that guided students' reflections: 1) *Take a photo of a condition on our campus that you find challenging, difficult or would like to see change. Write a narrative to go with the photo.* 2) *Take a photo of what you wish to experience, or that captures how you imagine the New University.* 3) *Write a narrative to go with each photo.* The culmination of students' reflections were thus visualized in the *Imagining the New University Photovoice Project*. *Theory in the flesh* is embodying and enacting critical reflexivity, and students engaged this through their photo-narratives, which I feature below.



Welcoming vibrations from buildings! – Arturo (photograph of murals and blank walls on campus, slide #12)



When I Imagine the New University, I envision a place where Black students and students of color feel heard and celebrated. Part of this includes learning about historical figures and voices like ours. These books are all the required materials for my political philosophy class, and the picture speaks for itself. I recognize the importance of these texts, but the lack of diverse voices is overwhelming. I'm sure there were Asian, Latinx, and Black political philosophers with similar, if not better, perspectives. Why must we only focus on white authors? Just because they are well known does not mean they are the only materials worth studying. Political science is already dominated by white males and POLI 30's exclusive curriculum makes it less appealing to students who already feel like the field wasn't made for them. If Santa Clara truly values diversity, this needs to be reflected in classrooms/teaching materials. – Denise (photograph of books from Political Science course, slide #6)



I imagine a university that prioritizes the environment and doesn't invest its endowment in the fossil fuel industry. As a Jesuit university, I believe that Santa Clara has a moral obligation to work towards investing in green energy and protecting the environment. This issue was initially brought up to the university many years ago yet remains a problem. It's simply not right to preach the importance of saving the climate while actively investing in fossil fuels. –Anonymous Student (photograph of birds eye view of campus, slide #9)

I chose a picture where the sun is visible because it represents something that future students look forward to when coming to Santa Clara. The sun is a symbol for the warmth that students experience temperature-wise however, how I envision the New University is as promisingly warm and accepting of all regardless of background into classes and the campus community. Just as students are promised a warm climate here at Santa Clara, I hope that when the school is advertised as welcoming and allowing students to be seen in their smaller class lives, the school lives up to the expectations because the temperature outside should not be the only promise being fulfilled. – Alex (photograph of sunshine on campus, slide #11)



The residence hall that I live in has the main entrance facing the street, which you are forced to enter through after 7 pm when the side doors close. Because I am consistently coming back after 7 pm I must walk on the sidewalk next to a busy road to get into my building. When coming back late after working in the library or the art building it can be kind of scary if there is a person standing on the corner or if there is a car parked near the door. While this is not a racially motivated issue it often makes me feel unsafe in my living environment. I would like the side doors to be always open rather than closing early. – Sophie (photograph of residence hall, slide #15)

The photo-narratives capture students' dreams for the *New University*; a place where they are seen, feel safe and cared for. According to Alex "*the New University is as promisingly warm and accepting of all...*" which resonates with Sophie's hopes for a safe and inclusive campus culture.

Feelings of care are also characteristics of *theory in the flesh*, which acknowledges the contradictions of lived experiences, yet the need to cultivate community despite differences. For example, Arturo notes the need for an inclusive campus that embraces the whole student. Denise echoes this as well by describing a campus environment "*where Black students and students of color feel heard and celebrated.*" To be seen and understood, according to Arturo and Denise, is to be recognized as a rightful member of the university. The photo-narratives demonstrated *theory in the flesh* via students' desires to exist in a *New University* where they can thrive and experience *El Mundo Zurdo*. In the seminar, students' hopes for the *New University* were guided by a *theory in the flesh* that connected their struggles for justice with demands by Third World Liberation Front student activists. The seemingly parallel experiences between students then and now did not make students in the seminar hopeless. On the contrary students saw validation in learning these histories, and it inspired them to "*pick up the torch,*" as Arturo remarked, toward a *New University* where *El Mundo Zurdo* as a place of abolition is not a dream but a reality of higher

education. Such subjectivities toward an *otherwise* were also expressed among youth in the *Youth for Justice Project* (YJP), which highlights the second principle: *research justice*.

Research Justice: *The Youth for Justice Project* (YJP)

Research justice is a paradigm that recognizes communities as powerful agents with control over their lives, and the right to wield knowledge and actions toward their liberation. Within this paradigm, research is utilized as a tool for the active disruption of colonialism that contributes to the reproduction of systemic inequities and epistemic violence in research, theory, practice, and policy. *Research justice* also seeks to address inequities in the research process. That is, justice is actualized when communities most impacted by systems are recognized, affirmed, and supported in their knowledge and positionalities as experts of such conditions with the capacities to reclaim, leverage, and wield all forms of knowledge and experiences to advance their agendas for systemic change, transformation, and liberation (Jolivéte, 2015). Prioritizing community voice in the deconstruction of knowledge and power is central to *research justice* as it aims to foster community leadership toward social change, whilst supporting the political power of communities of color, Indigenous peoples, and disenfranchised social groups.

In alignment with abolition psychology, specifically a critical and emancipatory analysis of power—locating both the oppressive dimensions of power at multiple-levels, and the power communities or collectives hold to wield their own liberation—*research justice* is the second principle. *Research justice* re-centers and strengthens communities in their efforts to respond, identify, and lead systemic change in the ethical, culturally grounded, and decolonial ways. Underscoring that all research processes must be accountable to communities impacted by systems, *research justice* is a collaborative and relational process grounded in community knowledge (Jolivéte, 2015). As a collective endeavor of shared knowledge and action, *research justice* sustains engagement with, and knowledge by and for communities best positioned to know or address their condition, which also aligns with liberation psychology (Montero, 2007).

To further demonstrate *research justice* as the second principle in abolition psychology, I offer a case study of a collaboration with middle school aged youth in the *Youth for Justice Project* (YJP) afterschool program. The YJP is an afterschool arts, advocacy, and critical ethnic studies oriented program that I, along with a team of two undergraduate student co-facilitators, have been leading since the fall of 2021. Located in the Guadalupe-Washington community, the middle school is the only private Catholic school in the area. Most of the students who attend the school are youth from the surrounding neighborhood whose siblings also attended the school, and/or were accepted into the school because of their academic performance and financial need. The YJP strives to foster the leadership, civic engagement, and community-based research skills of middle school aged youth, the majority of whom are Latinx, via art projects that

integrate advocacy and social action. We engage with as many as twenty youth to as few as seven youth who join our afterschool program sessions once a week for one hour. Although the YJP afterschool program is open to all youth, the majority of participating youth self-identify as girls.

The YJP follows a PAR (Participatory Action Research) approach, which is aligned with *research justice*. Through a PAR process, youth identify and determine an issue or condition that impacts them, they learn about the root causes of the condition, what caused it and why, and then together we develop an action or project to address it. Because PAR is an iterative, cyclical, and relational process, our work is ongoing and illustrative of *research justice*. One of the elements of *research justice* is that communities should own, wield, and leverage resources to sustain their voice, power, and agency. Thus, the YJP aims to cultivate this among youth through art and advocacy projects. The intentions of the YJP are to support youth sociopolitical development, and leadership via art-based advocacy projects that foster radical hope, and social action to redress environmental health conditions impacting their school-community contexts.

Through a PAR process we have supported youth in creating art projects, such as self-portraits, collages, photographs and art exhibits that document via images and stories, their hopes for their neighborhood. As a collaborative team, we integrate art to support youth in creating self-portraits and photo-narratives that capture their radical hopes to thrive and live in healthy environments. For example, during our sessions we engage youth in icebreakers or community building activities, as well as discussions about social issues, such as diversity, misrepresentation in the media, homelessness, unemployment, poverty, and gender rights, among other topics and intersectional injustices. All the topics are also discussed in relation to their school, neighborhood and community experiences and contexts. Then, through art centered activities youth depict community challenges about these issues in relation to their living conditions or concerns with public safety and housing insecurity. Youth create artwork from self-portraits to sketches to collages to illustrate a vision of a present-future. The abolition principle of *research justice* is demonstrated through youth artwork that advocates for resources, support and access to decision making power for their community. Drawing on reflections from the YJP, I highlight how youth developed skills to engage in critical research and inquiry that centered their lived experiences while imagining *El Mundo Zurdo*. I highlight some of their art to illustrate how abolition is possible when approached through a *research justice* principle.

The first art activity we led were *auto-retratos* (self-portraits). Youth drew how they see themselves, how others see them, and how they wish to be seen or see themselves in the future. The sociopolitical elements of this activity, for instance, are reflected in Veronica's drawing that features her dream of becoming a doctor to heal and care for people who are in pain:



"My dream is to become a doctor. I can change the world by treating people in need."
 – Veronica, 6th grader (drawing of cat and youth inside bubble, slide #7)

Imagining herself in a future where she has the skills and capacities to care for others, Veronica's drawing is politically oriented toward a radical form of relationality and accountability to support others with unmet health needs. By encouraging youth to describe aspects of themselves, they drew their dreams as reflections of the issues they wished to address. *Research justice*, like abolition, is about ideation and action. Lived experience can and must guide the vision of abolition as a possibility. The ongoing public health concerns associated with COVID-19 led some youth to acknowledge the urgency to care for communities in need. By encouraging youth to think about their futures we were having them reflect on the challenges alongside their hopes.

The *auto-retratos* were an opening to foster radical hope, a sense of community, and an understanding that while we are each unique, there are aspects of ourselves that we share or experience, such as a neighborhood. We encouraged youth to think of solutions to help create change in their environments by facilitating dialogues on youth futures and desires for themselves and society. A topic that surfaced frequently, for instance, was environmental justice. In an *auto-retrato*, Roxy illustrates themes of environmental sustainability in response to the question: *"How can you make a change in the world?"* Youth engaged this question through a series of smaller drawings and captions that illustrated possible strategies. Some of these strategies, although focused on surface level solutions such as minimizing carbon footprint and consumption, were nevertheless youth reflections on environmental justice concerns. Among some of the drawings were plant-based items, such as a

bamboo toothbrush, eco-friendly supplies, recycling, and composting. I offer Roxy's drawing and accompanying statement:



"You can change the world for good by throwing your trash in the garbage. Also having eco-friendly supplies, including plant-based items." The youth then chose to represent themselves through volleyball, signifying how they enjoy the sport and how to preserve our environment so they can continue to play, "before it's too late." – Roxy, 6th grader (earth drawing)

Through these activities and facilitated dialogues we provided opportunities for youth to creatively represent social issues, as we fostered radical hope, imagination, and visions for change. By creating self-portraits, some with depictions of themselves and others of the earth or what mattered to them, youth captured their aspirations toward imagining *El Mundo Zurdo*.

The second activity that we facilitated was collage making where youth captured visually their thoughts on society and the environment. One collage, for instance, highlighted youth views on society in relation to the environmental health, social relations, and overall quality of life. In describing her collage, Frida shared that it represented *"what is wrong with society:"*



“The pictures with the trash on the sidewalk make me sad because it shows how people don’t take care of the planet [earth] when they don’t recycle.” – Jonathan, 7th grader (photo #15)



“Turning the newsstand into a trashcan is not okay. This is for the news and not the trash. People who deliver the newspaper cannot do their job because they don’t have a place to put the news articles.” – Emily, 6th grader (photo #27)

Youth created artwork that was displayed in the hallway of their school as a way to share and connect with their school community. Most importantly, their art exhibit conveyed who they are—their identities, lived experiences, and future aspirations—along with their hopes and dreams for their school, families, and the surrounding neighborhood communities. Youth engaged *research justice* through art that situated them as experts in discerning or determining social issues of concern impacting their environments. At the same time, they also reflected upon and crafted futuristic narratives of themselves that featured their agency to redress some of the wrongs they were witnessing in their immediate contexts.

The art and advocacy engaged by youth in the YJP illustrates *research justice* as an abolition principle toward fostering *El Mundo Zurdo* against a backdrop of injustices. The activities that we facilitated helped scaffold youth action-project, which was a school exhibit featuring drawings, collages, and photo-narratives of community assets and challenges. Although our goal is to support youth in their sociopolitical development process, and raise awareness about community concerns to foster social change, as facilitators we also affirm that youth have power and agency. Thus, the principle of *research justice* aligns with *theory in the flesh*, and is also vital to creating relationships that allow for the third and last principle: *decolonial love*.

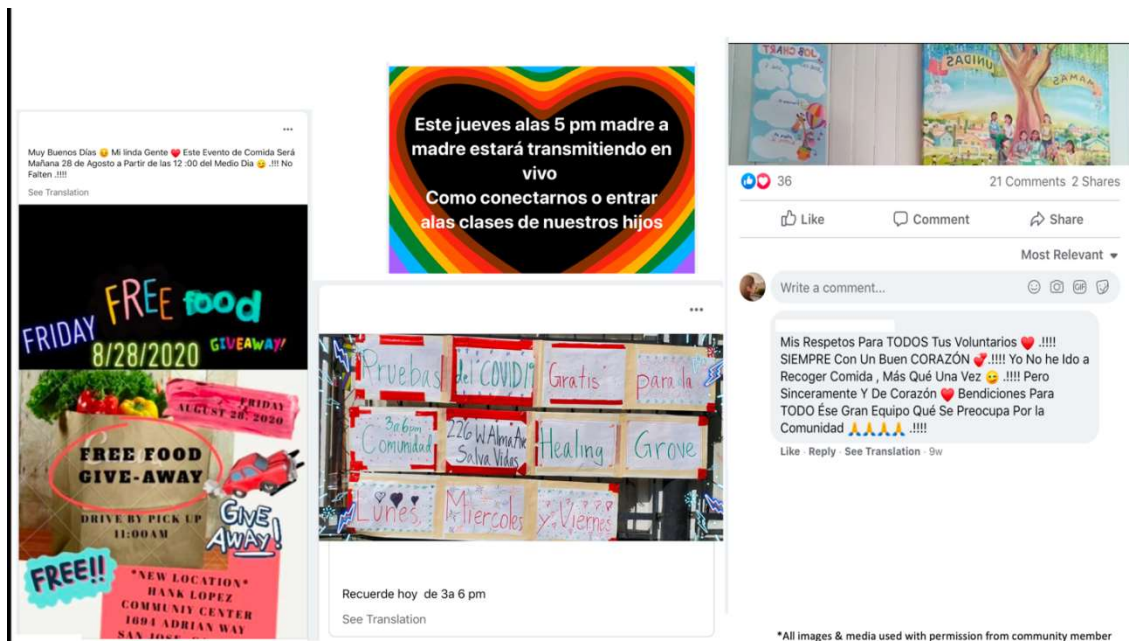
Decolonial Love: *Madres Emprendedoras* Organizing Community Care

Decolonial love involves solidarity and accountability (Dutta, 2021). It is a form of embodied (e.g., who or how we are) and enacted (e.g., what we do) relationality that “emerges as an antidote to dehumanizing narratives and processes, whether they are imposed internally or manifested as colonial wounds of self-hate” (Atallah et al., 2022, p. 8). Solidarity, often represented via relationships or interactions among individuals within communities can manifest in the physical, material objects or artifacts that help unite, connect and encourage collective care. Unlike the previous examples of *theory in the flesh* and *research justice* as abolition principles, the third example demonstrates *decolonial love* among the *Madres Emprendedoras*. The former case studies highlight my pedagogy and research, yet my work with the *madres* demonstrates my accompaniment and solidarity beyond our community research collaboration.

To contextualize the mobilizing by the *madres* in a predominantly Latinx and Spanish-speaking low-income community in San José (CA, USA), I describe *decolonial love* as the third abolition principle. In the context of COVID-19 many communities experienced the amplification of systemic injustices and inequities. Nevertheless, communities and groups, such as the *Madres Emprendedoras*, came together to mobilize resources for themselves. The *madres*, drew on their sociocultural, navigational, linguistic, and aspirational capital (Fernández, Guzmán, Bernal, & Flores, 2020) to develop strategies to care and support each other. The *madres* leveraged their collective resources to meet their needs, and found a means of being at ease in a world of unease. By enacting what Lugones (1987) describes as a process of resistance to oppressions

the *madres* embodied *decolonial love* via activities that allowed them to be “humanly bonded ... having a shared history with others, a daily history” that helped disrupt the coloniality of gender within systems of power. Thus the *madres* resisted hegemonic discourses about Latinas, who are often described as passive, disempowered or victims.

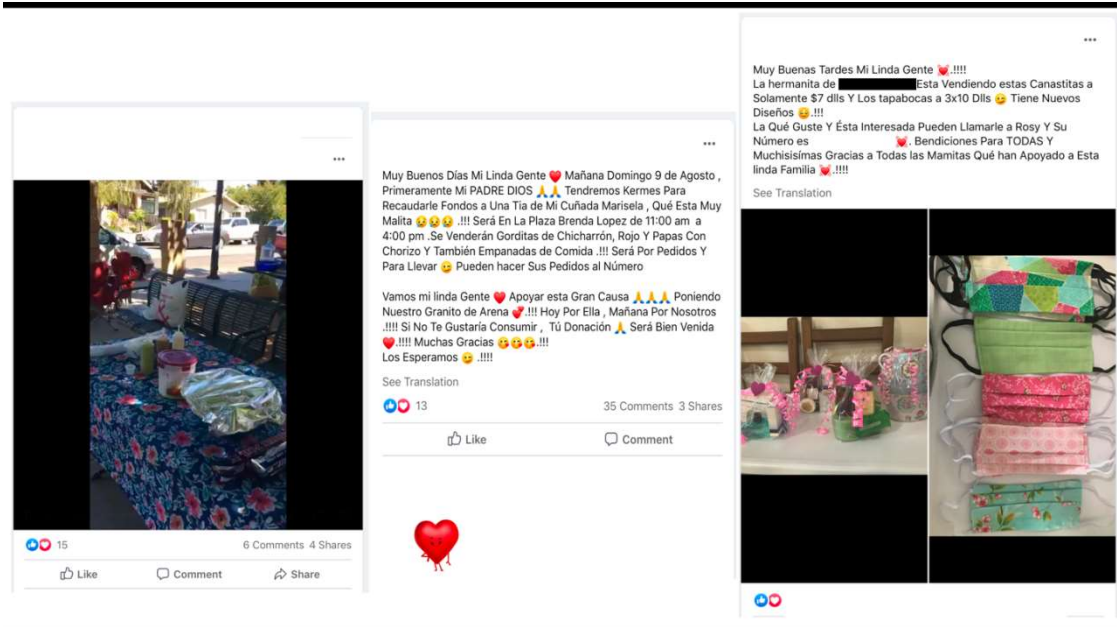
By supporting each other’s social, economic, and wellness needs during the pandemic the *madres* enacted *decolonial love*, and they strategically utilized social media to disseminate information about community resources. Through their use of social media, they sustained their relationality, accountability and community care aligned with *decolonial love*. Facebook, for example, was used to inform the community about local resources, as seen in their posts.



From access to free food to COVID-testing to virtual education resources for their children, the *madres* utilized the live streaming feature on social media to share information about services and events in their community. They also publicized their stories of living through the pandemic, and this helped foster support for one another. Sharing stories to conditions of life that would otherwise remain silent, unheard, and unseen, affirmed the *madres*’ agency and dignity.

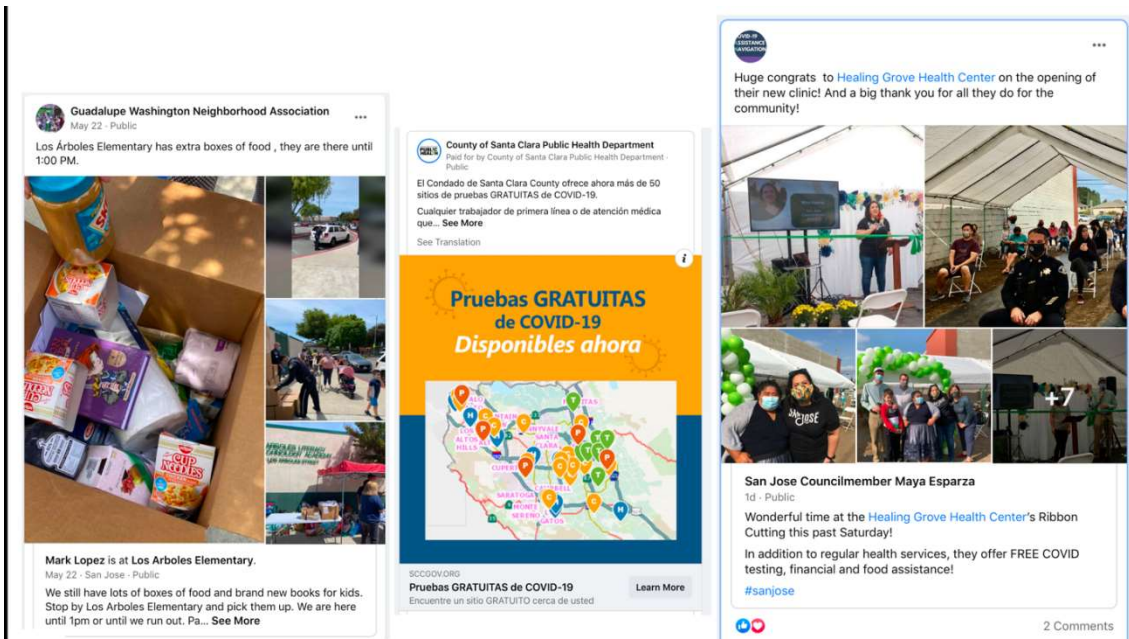
Thus, in addition to utilizing the social media feature to support their needs, the *madres* also formed connections with local leaders and stakeholders. A few months into the pandemic a new community health center opened its doors to the community, and several of the *madres* leveraged their connections and affiliations with city and county stakeholders, as well as faith-based organizations and nonprofits to advocate for the health and wellbeing of their community. One *madre*, for example, helped organize public events with stakeholders. The events

ranged from vaccination drives to public health resources to food and housing support in times of precarity to help meet their community's needs. The innovation and drive with which the *madres* engaged their resources and networks to support each other demonstrates *decolonial love*.



Several of the *madres* cultivated a sense of community and accountability by organizing *kermeses*, or food sales, to support families with limited financial resources. The *madres* pursued these and others form of economic support via informal labor, such as making face masks, delivering food and groceries, and creating goods to sale. *Decolonial love* was sustained by the *madres*' unwavering mutual care. Specifically, by the relationality that manifested as family-like ties, which they affirmed through their advocacy and creative entrepreneurialism, especially when civic and social institutions failed to offer social and economic aid, support, and resources.

Prior to COVID-19 resources were often centralized in existing organizations, such as the neighborhood association, community centers, faith-based organizations, and nonprofits. To access resources, however, community members must demonstrate or provide evidence of need, or be positioned as recipients deserving of services. Under COVID-19 these resources became incredibly limited, and even inaccessible to some families. This led some of the *madres* to shift their roles from receivers of services to providers, advocates, and organizers of these resources.



The *madres* engaged in volunteer and leadership opportunities as *promotoras de salud*, or health promotion workers, who connected families with local resources—from health clinics to testing sites to shelters and affordable housing, especially for evicted families. When a community member experienced a difficult situation, the *madres* organized themselves to lift each other up, and provide care and support. This attests to *decolonial love* as an abolition principle where people do not rely on the state or its institutions for support, but rather they rely on each other.

In learning from and accompanying the *madres* in their organizing process, I consider their actions as embodiments of *decolonial love* aligned with abolition because they fostered solidarity and accountability in the absence of failing systems and institutions. The *madres* demonstrated qualities of *El Mundo Zurdo* where in the words of political activist James “Jimmy” Boggs, “It is only in relationship to other bodies, and many somebodies, that anybody is somebody” (2016, p. xiv). Affirming relationships of mutuality through collective relational care rooted in solidarity and accountability as mutual care is the *madres’* expressed *decolonial love*. Through their organizing and fundraising efforts they provided materials, resources, support, and services to each other, and created a community of care at a time when feeling connected was severely compromised by social distancing protocols and COVID-19 health concerns. The *Madres Emprendedoras* enacted a counter-discourse of Latinx agency, resilience, and collective determination via their community grassroots organizing efforts embodied as *decolonial love*. *Decolonial love*, like *El Mundo Zurdo*, are not abstractions, it is an act of being or co-existing in ways that heal and sustain even in the worst of times. Anzaldúa’s (1987) vision to “act in the everyday world” in ways that create and bring *El Mundo Zurdo* into being was exemplified through *madres’* embodied abolition principle of *decolonial love*.

The community mobilizing efforts led by the *Madres Emprendedoras* is an example of abolition as *decolonial love*. *Decolonial love* is the embodiment of solidarity and accountability that unshackles communities from a state of oppression to one of liberation that sustains and affirms dignity. *Decolonial love* unites through humanizing reciprocal relational recognitions. *Decolonial love* is an abolition principle that reflects Lugones' (1987) notion of world-traveling, or entering each other's lives with the intent to experience mutual liberation. Yet the traveling is not voyeuristic or disembodied, rather it is relational or in *acompañamiento* with others fostering communities of co-resistance to power. *Decolonial love* is synergistic; it allows for individual, relational and collective growth, fostered through relationships of mutuality, or accompaniment via shared experiences. *Decolonial love* is a process of personal and collective healing where Freire (1970) notes that dialogue sets the foundation for love. To achieve this, the conditions and discourses that reify the existence and maintenance of dehumanization must be abolished. The *Madres Emprendedoras*'s dialogues via social media carried onto public community organizing efforts that served to create elements of *El Mundo Zurdo*, and thus the third abolition principle.

Concluding Reflections and Visions of Abolition

Abolition psychology is oriented toward a decolonial liberation psychology, a psychology *of* and *for* liberation. The examples I provided illustrate the possibilities of a decolonial liberation psychology rooted in abolition. By challenging the pervasiveness of individualism, objectivity, and disembodied inquiry within psychology, and among communities living on the margins, an abolition psychology toward *El Mundo Zurdo* is possible. As an embodied critical ethical reflexivity *theory in the flesh* (Fernández, 2018), and *research justice* with communities in action, can carve a path of *El Mundo Zurdo*. Decoloniality, as Daigle and Ramirez (2019) contend, "is an affirmative refusal of white supremacy, anti-blackness, the settler colonial state, and a racialized political economy of containment, displacement and violence" (p. 80) (as cited in Atallah et al., 2022). Love becomes critical because it is an expression of being that turns wounds or rage into a bridge to build and transform (Atallah, 2022, p. 10). *Theory in the flesh*, *research justice*, and *decolonial love* are thus interconnected abolition principles.

Abolition, in resonance with Fanon's (2008) conceptualization of decoloniality is an active attitude and openness to shift away from the hierarchical norms imposed upon colonized peoples. It is the desire to be/become vulnerable and intimate in one's relations, to learn and generate radical hope, and pluriversal possibilities. Abolition psychology that affirms dignity, supports community struggle, and fosters knowledge, practices, and relationships in the pursuit of and for liberation, is possible. The antidote to the despair and disillusionment with the extant state of the discipline, especially in the U.S., is abolition. Thus, what can we cultivate, sow, and see grow from a place of abolition? What are the possibilities for abolition psychology anchored in

decoloniality and liberation, and in principles of *theory in the flesh*, *research justice* and *decolonial love*? *Decolonial love* is ideation that is embodied and enacted in and through refusal, resistance, and radical hope cultivated in relationship with ourselves (*theory in the flesh*) and others (*research justice*). Such decolonial encounters assert for us that another way of being is possible—we have the skills, capacities, and resources to bring it into being.

Abolition psychology can help actualize *El Mundo Zurdo*, and this requires we engage and develop new praxes, embodiments, enactments, and epistemologies that are transgressive to existing standards, and ontological or epistemological conventions of psychology. The call to enact abolition psychology requires a disciplinary paradigm shift. Anzaldúa (1981) alerted us to change when writing that change “requires both the alchemist and the welder, the magician and the laborer, the witch and the warrior, the myth-smasher, and the mythmaker. Hand in hand, we brew and forge a revolution” (p. 196). The change desired, requires that psychology be undone and transformed with, though, and from the underside—with the communities we engage with but seldom involve in decision making, the participants we observe and often misrecognize, and the groups or peoples we categorize when we know we are much more than a mere labels.

Abolition psychology is a decolonial liberation psychology that disrupts systems of power. Abolition is the eradication or elimination of conditions and circumstances that impinge upon people’s humanity—the freedom to be and experience freedom, intergenerational healing and wellbeing, and conditions of living with dignity. Thus, abolition psychology is a movement that acts to address and transform circumstances of hegemonic power and oppression that foreclose possibilities of dignity, justice and thriving. To engage abolition is to support, foster, and sustain the wellbeing and thriving of communities as a process of thinking and doing *otherwise*. Instead of focusing on problems or deficits presumed to be found within communities, abolition psychology prioritizes community strengths and assets, dreams and desires, hopes and imagination. It fuses this to create conditions of existence aligned with decolonial liberation tied to transformative justice. Abolition principles enact refusal, resistance, and radical hope. The imagination, joy and relationality that characterize it also involve understanding historic and contemporary forms of dehumanization to instead affirm dignity and liberation. Abolition psychology works to delink ourselves from coloniality and colonization, and to cultivate liberation as a way of living. Without romanticizing the experience, liberation is capacious, live-giving, healing, and wholesome, and I have offered three principles toward enacting abolition.

To interrupt the conditions that dehumanize and disenfranchise those on the margins is a necessary abolition principle to our survivance. Abolition is the principle that all beings should experience a healthy, thriving life unconstrained by the coloniality of power that compromises wellbeing, dignity, and sustainability. Abolition at its very core is a simple concept. Yet it is often seen as an otherworldly, radical, or even militant idea. What is threatening about abolition is that it challenges structures of power and systems of violence that

have been rendered normal. Abolition interrogates the *status quo* as it deconstructs “the social lie” (Martín-Baró, 1994, p. 188), or the stories that reinforce a sense of normalcy yet leave power intact. To bring abolition visions and movements forward, we must challenge hegemonic systems of power. Reflecting this vision Gilmore (2007) affirms that abolition is the presence of all we need to sustain ourselves through transnational intergenerational liberation. I am enlivened by the principle and acts of living for abolition as decolonial liberation *hacia El Mundo Zurdo*..

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Historical-Cultural Psychology: What is it intended for?¹ Theses on the inseparability of psychology and politics

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Abstract

This discussion aims to highlight the social purpose of a given theory, specifically Historical-Cultural Psychology. It starts from the historical-dialectical materialist position for which every theory, however abstract it may be, has a concrete root has a historically determined genesis and development. The psychological currents that have developed since the birth of Psychology as a science in the early twentieth century have been and are crossed, albeit with different nuances, by conceptions in which both idealism and mechanistic materialism predominate. This opposition also characterizes the reading of certain contemporary interpreters of Historical-Cultural Psychology. Entering the debate, the text is articulated around the defense of three theses, which are related to each other: 1) every psychological theory has an implicit or explicit political position; 2) what validates a theory is its ability to historically update itself in essential explanation of the phenomena it faces, and 3) The only approach possibility concerning theories is due to their philosophical-methodological basis. This text aims to draw attention to the risk that Historical-Cultural Psychology may be so transformed as to conform to the bourgeois social order from reformist positions. Hence, the defense that the abandonment of historical-dialectical materialism, the analytical basis of Marx and

¹¹ The article's title was inspired by a verse from the song "Cajuína" by the Brazilian singer and composer Caetano Veloso. This song was released on the album "Cinema transcendental" in 1982 and pays homage to Torquato Neto, one of the founders of the Tropicalist movement. At the age of 28, the day after his birthday, Torquato Neto committed suicide after much suffering because of the corporate-military regime (1964-1989) and the exile of his friends. Caetano Veloso, in this song, tributes to Torquato's father and his friend. The verse that inspired the title is: "We exist, what is it intended for?" (Existirmos, a que será que se destina? Available at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=nmd7Nw9KqaE>).

Engels' social theory, is the key point for identifying what presents as misrepresentation/distortion or necessary transformation. The assumption expressed in the 11th thesis on Feuerbach affirming knowledge is an instrument of transformation defends the historical-dialectical materialist method. At the same time, it should guide us so that Historical-Cultural Psychology advances as science and praxis, not becoming a dogma or reducing itself to an empty encyclopedism. The point is to affirm it as a material force that assists in the revolutionary transformation of reality, contributing to the construction of knowledge committed to human emancipation and not to the deepening of barbarism. This is its political purpose.

Keywords

Historical-Cultural Psychology, Marxism, policy, socialism

Introduction

This article originates from a malaise related to the discussions that circulate within the Marxist tradition, particularly by authors affiliated with Historical-Cultural Psychology. As with any theory, the psychological currents that have developed since the birth of Psychology as a modern science in the early twentieth century have been and are crossed, albeit with different nuances, by conceptions in which both idealism and mechanistic materialism predominate. This pendulum is not exclusive to non-Marxist psychologies. Still, as paradoxical as it may be, it has an impact within Marxist approaches, as Löwy (1987) exposes, and in Historical-Cultural Psychology. These positions also divide contemporary interpreters. On both sides, we come across forms of abandonment - partial or total - of the historical-philosophical foundations of this tradition in psychology, especially the Marxian legacy and its entrenchment in the Russian revolutionary movement of 1917.

From the methodological point of view, making the historical-dialectical materialist method autonomous from the social theory elaborated by Marx and Engels is impossible. In the perspective of totality, a rigorous separation between procedure and factual investigation is illegitimate. More than a personal mistake, we understand such interpretations are rooted in the psychology crisis itself, as discussed by the creators of Historical-Cultural Psychology, a methodological crisis. Vygotsky (1996) conducted an exhaustive study of what he called the "historical meaning of the crisis in Psychology", demonstrating the materiality of the clashes in the field of psychological ideas in his time. Materialism and idealism represent not only sterile philosophical discussions but rather the philosopher's position facing the objective and social world, and therefore concerning social classes and their historical interests. In

turn, Vygotsky, Leontiev and Luria performed numerous studies demonstrating the limits of the psychological currents of their time, part of them linked to the heritage of philosophy that preceded them, but also due to the previously existing (im)possibilities of objectively overcoming this dualism. Thus, they denounced in their time the political implications and the compromise of the existing psychological currents by spraying or non-identification, fragmentation, or partiality in the analysis of its object, with the maintenance of the capitalist society, which made them denominate such currents of bourgeois psychologies.

Vygotsky (1996) diagnosed that overcoming the psychology crisis would favor the emergence of a new psychology for a new human being, who would be responsible for unveiling his object in motion, in transformation and from the concreteness that determines him. The struggle for a contemporary classless society could not be done without psychological knowledge, knowledge of the essence and multidetermination of its object. Besides, Historical-Cultural Psychology, since its roots, has not intended to be “neutral” or “apolitical,” and, thereby, we defend it should be essentially anti-capitalist in its most diverse fields of activity, aiming for a socialist society. A Historical-Cultural Psychology that is not guided by the historical perspective of the construction of socialism cannot claim to continue the work of Vygotsky, Luria and Leontiev.

Reflecting and positioning ourselves before the possible destinations of Historical-Cultural Psychology in the context of the ideological decadence of capitalist society (Lukács, 1979) - marked by the almost absolute hegemony of positivist science in psychology, combined or not with various nuances of neoliberal postmodern thought - we assume the explicit revolutionary radicalism of this theory to the detriment of the vulgarization and degenerations that have been suffering more intensely in this first quarter of the 21st century, which we will address throughout the text. The organization of our text, in defense of the revolutionary radicalism of the cultural-historical theory for those subjects committed to overcoming the bourgeois order, is articulated around three interrelated theses.

The **first thesis** seeks to demonstrate the path taken by a school of social psychology in Brazil, The São Paulo School (Escola de São Paulo), delimiting two distinct periods of its intellectual evolution. The authors representing this perspective produced their first investigations and theoretical elaborations in the context of the corporate-military dictatorship in Brazil (1964-1989) and asserted a radical critique of capitalist society. In the second moment of its theoretical elaboration, from the 1990s - marked by the defeat of the experiences of Soviet socialism - the São Paulo School of Social Psychology undertook a reformist theoretical turn. The brief demonstration of this school's course can guide us to the dangers of a similar process with Historical-Cultural Psychology.

The **second thesis** advances the current debate within Historical-Cultural Psychology in contemporary times. Is Historical-Cultural Psychology, whose origins date back to the Russian Revolution of 1917, a dated and outdated theory or can/should it be updated?

Trying not to fall into the traps of superficiality, we base the analysis on what is hidden behind the various forms of dissemination and vulgarization of a theory whose genesis is effectively revolutionary. We seek to explain that the attempts to disconnect Vygotsky from Marxian social theory, which presupposes a specific method of analysis of reality, reveal a political position to neutralize the radicality of Historical-Cultural Psychology.

The **third thesis** concludes our argument by demonstrating how Vygotsky (1996) laid the ground-stones for what he called the Capital of Psychology in his classic text analyzing the crisis of Psychology at that time. For that author, producing the Capital of Psychology is to approach its object in its concreteness and multidetermination, apprehending its genesis, structure and development in the historical movement. We highlight that Historical-Cultural Psychology is sustained on Marx's elaboration on world conception and general philosophy. From the same totalizing perspective, Vygotsky understands the necessary articulation of the most varied sciences in and for explaining society and the social being. They both attempt to explain social life and its contradictions in capitalism, to transform it in the direction of the full development of human potentialities, fighting for maximum personality growth, as Leontiev also advocates(2021).

Thesis 1 – Every psychological theory has an implicit or explicit political position

The statement that every psychological theory has an underlying political position is already - in a way - a truism. However, it is expected that the necessary theoretical-practical consequences do not accompany this assertion. In Brazil, the popularization of this thesis gained a truly national reach, with the authors representing the São Paulo School of Social Psychology (Lane & Codo, 1984) from the 1980s on. Paradoxically, the same formulators who, in the 1980s, pointed out the need for psychology to clarify the socio-political commitments engendered in its theories and methods and affirmed the responsibility to contribute to the overcoming of capitalist society adhered - from the 1990s onwards - to an abstract, generic social transformation perspective, in which every kind of apology (overt or covert) from the bourgeois order fits, as the ideology of anti-Marxism, yet they are not openly committed to such ideology. In

what will follow, we will initially examine the format the São Paulo School gave to the thesis presented in this section to demonstrate how the abandonment of Marx and Engels' social theory and an emancipatory project of social transformation was incisive - but not explicit or declared - carried out by this same school.

A tradition in Social Psychology that was built in direct opposition to American cognitive social psychology is referred to by this same school, guided by the experimental perspective, the study of small groups, the abandonment of significant theories and the view of totality and by the phenomena naturalization and/or psychologization that are, at their root, social. The School of São Paulo's authors consulted the social theory of Marx and Engels - besides other classics and contemporaries of Marxism - for the foundations of social psychology committed to overcoming class society. São Paulo School authors sought in Marx and Engels' social theory - besides other classics and contemporaries of Marxism - the foundations of social psychology committed to overcoming class society. Other important influences for this tradition were Historical-Cultural Psychology (which even inspires some of the categories considered essential in social psychology, namely: activity, consciousness and identity [the latter replacing personality]), the emerging Theory of Social Representations by Serge Moscovici, the Social Identity Theories of Israel and Tajfel, and the production of Latin- American social psychologists such as Martin-Baró, Alberto Merani and Maritza Montero, as well as other intellectuals of Latin-American social thought such as the sociologist Orlando Fals Borda and Paulo Freire. The scientist production of this group, from which we highlight the contributions of Silvia Lane, Bader Sawaia, Wanderley Codo and Antonio Ciampa, originates from the studies initially guided by Silvia Lane and later by her first graduate students in Social Psychology Postgraduation at the Pontifical Catholic University of São Paulo, which, even today, is the main center of research production of this school. It is essential to underline that this theory in social psychology was developed in the context of the corporate-military dictatorship imposed by the Brazilian ruling classes between 1964 and 1989. The commitment to the social transformation of reality needs to be apprehended precisely in this context: that transformation that marches on in overcoming class society and labor exploitation (Carvalho, 2014). A vital mark present in the theses and dissertations of these intellectuals is evident in the fact that, in general, the first chapter of these productions was dedicated to - starting from the object of investigation in question - analyzing how the classical theories in psychology and social psychology conceived the relation between individual and society in the examination of that object. Let us briefly see how Sawaia (1979), in the Marxist phase of his production, conducts this in his master's dissertation by

pointing to the intrinsic relation between any psychological theory and its correspondent in the field of social theory.

When performing, in her master's thesis, an examination of the great traditions in social psychology, Sawaia (1979) highlights the existing common conservative fund as in the sociologizing as in the psychologizing approaches of social psychology, with the following:

The two theoretical lines, however contradictory they may seem, contain a conservative perspective and can be seen as an ideological manifestation to avoid effective changes in the lived reality. Emphasizing the importance of the social over the individual, reifying society, and showing that it has its order of explanation, means nullifying the possibilities of a transforming action on the part of the individual.

On the other hand, stressing the psychological dimension of problems arising from an objective social system, saying that therein lies their solution, considering that psychological facts have their order of explanation, means alienating the individual from the social totality in which he lives. They all end up being (directly or indirectly) a justification of what exists, the legitimation of the social system in which they operate, and the acceptance of present social structure. (Sawaia, 1979, p. 9).

The author establishes an essential relationship between psychological and social theories in the work mentioned above. With Skinner's radical behaviorism, Sawaia relates the extension of Durkheim's socio-determinism, for whom the individual has little freedom of action before the regularity of social facts (Sawaia, 1979). On the methodological level, both identified their theories' alleged axiomatic (and, by extension, political) neutrality with scientific objectivity. Here are two examples of how the hypostasis of social (Durkheim) and environmental (Skinner) determinations can lead to a conservative position in a world where the margin of human action is omitted. On the other hand, Kurt Lewin overestimates the role of the individual in social changes, in addition to identifying the virtuous characteristics of a group and of leadership as those compatible with the values of bourgeois liberal democracy in its opposition to authoritarianism (democracy, formal equality, individualism, naturalized relationship between leader and group members) by recognizing the importance of meaning and intentionality of human action – just like Weber in sociology – as an essential element in the psychological investigation of small groups. Skinner's psychology, by transforming environmental contingencies into an absolute in which freedom of human action has little significance and Lewin's psychology of small groups, by identifying as universal characteristics of groups and

leaderships, those values proper to liberal democracies, cooperate - rarely explicitly - in maintaining bourgeois social order.

According to Sawaia (1979), the only social theory capable of adequately equating the relation between the individual and society is historical-dialectical materialism, insofar as it situates the individual's margin of action (historically variable) within the constitutive relations between material productive forces and social relations of production. Lane (1984a), in turn, repeatedly directed her criticism to the pragmatic orientation of the American perspective of social psychology, which, when studying the theme of groups, reduced this object to small groups, to which any proposal for social change would be tied, leaving out of their formulations and investigations the analysis of the totality of social life and how groups and individuals participate in this whole. Ultimately, this orientation (which had in Lewin, its most important representative) of the group analysis process concluded the need to construct a "strong democratic [group] leadership" (Lane, 1984b, p. 15). This political orientation (democratic and conservative) of social psychology had significant resonance in the American post-war, with the newly defeated Nazi-fascism and liberal and bourgeois democracy figuring as a horizon for the reconstruction of the world. Lewin translated - into his group theory - the most sincere and naive beliefs in American liberal democracy.

While on the one hand, it is easy to retain the meaning of the thesis presented in this section from the works of Sawaia (1979) and Lane (1984b), when the authors analyze widely established psychological theories such as those mentioned above (behaviorism, Lewin's group psychology, etc.), on the other hand, the task becomes more complicated when we examine the political commitments of those theories that criticized hegemonic ideas in psychology, such as the São Paulo School of Psychology itself and - recently - some formulations of Historical-Cultural Psychology.

In the São Paulo School studies until the late 1980s, their political commitment to social transformation of reality had a sense that - although rarely explicitly affirming the social revolution as a necessity for human emancipation - placed it alongside those social forces that considered the capitalism overcoming to be the goal to which science should contribute. After all, the economic foundation of this society is that one through which "[...] a few dominate, and many are dominated through labor power exploitation." (Lane, 1981, p. 23). Codo (1984) argued not only that psychology should contribute to the process of developing class consciousness and struggle "for a new social system" (p. 142) but that the workers' struggle for a new society "requires a political intervention (passion) which destroys its [capitalism's] genesis (the individual as the means of production ownership), that promotes a revolution in the economy" (Codo, 1985,

p. 94) and further, “[...] only a revolutionary party is capable of making revolution” (Codo, 1985, p. 94). Although the assumption of the need for social revolution is quite evident in Codo’s works from the 1980s, it is necessary to say that this position was not homogeneous in the group’s works of that period. Still, they all affirm that the need to overcome capitalism is inevitable, whose fundamental contradiction is between capital and labor. Psychology should also contribute to this process of radically overcoming class society alongside the exploited.

A small space of time and a series of events of enormous world-historical significance separate this first and fruitful phase of the intellectual production of the São Paulo School from that period that was opened in the 1990s onwards, when Soviet socialism was defeated – whose dramatic outcomes were represented in the fall of the Berlin Wall and the dissolution of Soviet Socialist Republics – and intellectuals on the right (Francis Fukuyama) and on the left (Habermas e Heller²) rush to present their formulas to reform the new-old-bourgeois world. With Heller, social contradictions come to be translated in terms of civil society’s struggle for universalizing civil and democratic rights. Although he does not deny the persistence of class struggles, Heller (1984) states the goal of class struggles is to force the dominant part of society to listen to the reasons of the exploited and to give in to their demands, not the seizure of power by the exploited. Habermas (2000), in his turn, transforms social contradictions into a kind of philosophical clash in which the world of life (the space of communicative action) is constantly threatened by instrumental reason and, therefore, the horizon of social struggles should be the broadening of communicative action, oriented toward consensus. These two philosophers, whose political commitment is the full realization of bourgeois democracy, form the pair of theorists with whom the São Paulo School has abandoned Marxism’s fundamental concepts and ideas, such as a) labor centrality; b) the objective contradiction between the interests of the main classes of society (bourgeoisie and proletariat); c) the idea that the working class is the revolutionary subject in capitalism, as pointed out by Carvalho (2014). No wonder the multilateral institutions of imperialism, such as the United Nations, will be intoned by Ciampa (2003) as a plural space for realizing the abstract utopia of communicative action. For him, “With all the undeniable problems and difficulties, the UN has always represented the possible advance in the civilizing process. Their human rights policy can be seen as an expression of emancipatory ethics with universalist pretensions” (Ciampa, 2003, p. 242). The subject of social transformation in Ciampa appears as “each and everyone”, regardless of their class belonging or commitment, and social institutions (since plural and not

² The latter in his post-Marxist phase.

fundamentalist, to use the author's empty words) figure as the subject of social transformation. The bourgeois attitude of the political commitment of the São Paulo School acquires quite dramatic contours when we observe what Silvia Lane – the prominent architect of that school – wrote about social transformations: “[...] it is not necessary to have class struggles – as recent events in Eastern Europe - but ethical changes at the individual level” (Lane, 1994, p. 79). Even though the São Paulo School of Social Psychology has two very notable moments of its intellectual evolution - a first, explicitly and implicitly committed to Marxism and the overcoming of class society, and a second, marked by the implicit abandonment of Marx and Engels' social theory and by the adoption of a progressive social-liberal approach - the teaching of social psychology in Brazil is still performed as if the current thinking of this school still corresponded to what it was until the 1980s.

Just as societies are in perpetual change, the political commitment of psychological theories is not invariable. And that goes for Skinner and Lewin's theories and the São Paulo School. The emptying of the radical content of social transformation that marks the production of the São Paulo School from the 1990s onwards (Carvalho, 2014) is a tragic example of the historicity of psychological theories. Although tragic, this fate is a reference for what we must fight against in defense of Historical-Cultural Psychology, its vitality and historical viability.

In the Historical-Cultural Psychology debate, it is already commonplace criticism of those appropriations of the theory that try to distance Marxism from it or, unfoundedly, to relate the abundant references to Marxism present in the works of this school to concessions and protocol citations made to avoid censorship and please the Soviet authorities. This anti-historical approach was already well denounced by Tuleski (2008, 2015) and Duarte (2001), and in Brazil, it is rare to find anyone defending such a position. However, there is another expedient in progress to undermine the radically Marxist political content of historical-cultural psychology and make it compatible with the social-liberal ideals. We refer to those attempts to minimize its relevance without denying the Marxian and Marxist basis of Cultural-Historical Psychology. We refer to those attempts to reduce its significance without denying the Marxian and Marxist basis of historical-cultural psychology. This position is evident in those attempts to maximize differences between Vygotsky and Leontiev until making them incompatible authors (which sometimes includes bringing documented personal ruptures and disagreements, as if they were sufficient proof of such theoretical distancing), in the hypostasis of Judaism and Spinozism present in Vygotsky's intellectual formation to the detriment of Marxism, or even in the invention (in our view absurd) of creative and original materialism by Vygotsky in opposition to Leontiev's allegedly mechanistic and non-dialectical materialism. In sum, just

as the theories, their interpretations carry an implicit or explicit political positioning. The omission of the fundamentals in the case of Historical-Cultural Psychology is evidenced as a conservative maneuver.

Thesis 2 – What validates a theory is its ability to historically update itself in essential explanation of the phenomena it faces

In the previous thesis, we briefly discussed two moments of the intellectual evolution of the São Paulo School, whose propositions started from the explicit commitment and need to overcome class society for an adherence – not always apparent – to bourgeois democratic order. We are concerned with the existence of reformist tendencies within Cultural-Historical Psychology - at the current level of bourgeois society's ideological decadence (Lukács, 1979) - whose destiny may be the conformity to the order, as it had occurred with the São Paulo School of Social Psychology, either as a result of an ideo-political shift or a “revisionist revolution” in the historical and theoretical understanding of the Historical and Cultural Psychology, its schools, and its relation to Marxism.

What has been exposed so far brings us to the second thesis. Knowing that theories are in permanent transformation since their objects and relations framework in which they are included are also in transformation, we need to establish the conditions in which theoretical changes represent an advance in the direction of better apprehending the object for which they are intended and those in which such changes best mean an abstract need to update theories whose meaning is the emptying of their revolutionary content. About Historical-Cultural Psychology, it is common to allude, in favor of its updating, to the fact that its origin is linked to the October Revolution of 1917 and, therefore, a series of revisions and adjustments would be necessary to serve the Brazilian reality of the 21st century. Explicitly or implicitly, it is argued that this theory can only respond to our needs if adaptations and simplifications are made and junctions with other more “current” or “updated” theories. Duarte (2001) performs an in-depth analysis of authors who, even claiming Historical-Cultural Psychology, approach and defend those so-called progressive pedagogies in educational debate. Still, in essence, they are conservative since, in practice, they deflate the teacher's role in instructional processes and minimize the importance of scientific knowledge to be transmitted by the school and, with that, radically distance themselves from the historical-cultural conception of relations between teaching and development and – by extension – from its theory on the formation of the individual.

Among the ideological strategies denounced by Duarte (2001), but also by Tuleski (2015), Ratner (2019) and Silva (2022), we can list: 1) junction or approximation of Historical-Cultural Psychology with Piaget's Genetic Psychology, joined as complementary; 2) attempts to distance Vygotsky's and Leontiev's formulations, either by raising differences and divergences to the degree of theoretical-methodological incompatibility or by transforming episodes of personal confrontation (whose motivations are essential to be stressed but not sufficiently documented) into evidence of this incompatibility; 3) replacement of Vygotsky's writings by summarized/censored and/or edited interpretations or translations; 4) defense of eclecticism as a "newly" way of doing science, as advocated by neoliberal postmodern conceptions.

While, on the one hand, we reject eclecticism and revisionism as ways of giving to Historical-Cultural Psychology the up-to-dateness that a theory needs to respond to the exploited demands of our time and our national reality, on the other hand, we reaffirm the fact that the theoretical-conceptual evolution of any theory requires the correct positioning of objective parameters that support the proposed revisions. In short, in the object to which a given theory is dedicated, to identify what is fundamental, essential, and more permanent is necessary, as well as what is lateral, apparent and precise, to situate better the nature of the changes/transformations through which the object has gone, and that claims its counterpart in terms of ideas processing. In the specific case of Historical-Cultural Psychology, whose object is psychism, in its human quality, consciousness, due to its Marxist base, approaching it within capitalist sociability, detaching it from the current alienation processes is impossible. Without this, any reassessment or reformulation of a theory is subject to the researcher's subjectivity, who wants to see in the science he practices expression of his best wishes, even if at mischaracterizing cost or principles and foundations changing of that theory or – at the limit – elaboration of a "newly" approach under the same label.

We understand that this process of metamorphosis of theories of genesis revolutionary is part of capitalism's logic, which transforms everything into merchandise, whose use values are subsumed by the value form. The Historical-Cultural Psychology customization- with the consequent emptying of its revolutionary content, the fading of Marxism within it and the demonization of the Soviet experience in which it was initially developed - serves this perspective adjustment to the prevailing conservative ideologies, albeit discursively progressive, and, more importantly, makes it more palatable in the production, diffusion and research financing circuits dominated by capitalist production demands and value valorization. There is a reversal of the purposes of a theory

whose development was intended to contribute to the formation of the new socialist man and woman (Vygotsky, 2004).

But what parameters can guide us to unveil the pertinence or not of the transformations within a theory over time, advancing from apparent progressive discourse to fidelity to its fundamental principles? What does it tell us if this theory is still valid in our historical period? The answer to these questions takes us back to the material base, the phenomena these theories initially addressed, from which their object of study and methodological principles emerged. Do these phenomena still exist, even if historically transformed? And if they still exist in an altered form, what is the nature and extent of these changes?

We exemplify based on Marx's studies in his workbook *Capital* (Marx, 2006), elaborated in the 19th century. Can his theories at that time still guide us in the 21st century? We defend that the answer is affirmative because the object Marx committed to investigating - the bourgeois society's genesis, development, crisis and trends - was not overcome in its foundations. The capitalist production mode is still based on labor exploitation in wages, extraction of surplus and consequent value appreciation as the ultimate end of the production process. Despite these essential elements, capitalist modes of accumulation and work management have not been the same since Marx's theorization, and it was up to Marxists to advance in the understanding of Fordism, Taylorism and Toyotism and the hybridity of these patterns that characterizes the work organization in the set of dominated economies of the capitalist system. The more the power of capital over all spheres of social life is amplified, the more the forms of domination multiply. Despite these essential historical transformations that capitalism has undergone, the General Law of capitalist accumulation still prevails. The more the economic foundation determines the tendency toward expanding the concentration of wealth, the more social wealth is produced by the working class. Recently, the social democrat Thomas Piketty (2014) conducted rigorous research gathering statistical information on income, wealth, and capital from over three centuries, demonstrating the concentrations nature of the capitalist production mode has not ceased to operate for a moment, as stated by Marx above. Hence, we have briefly exposed some aspects of Marx's object, which remain what they were (labor exploitation, wage formation, capitalist accumulation general law, and social classes). At the same time, there are elements of capitalist development that objectively demanded updating (such as the imperialist concepts, capitalist accumulation patterns and labor management, domination forms, etc.) from the Marxist field. Thus, Marx's theory is still relatively current - and will remain so if we do not overturn the economic and social foundations of the capitalist production mode - but his theory's vitality lies precisely in the fact that it must permanently monitor its object development.

Regarding Historical-Cultural Psychology, we have the same perception: do the understanding of psychism formation and constitution and the personality in its singularity remain crossed by the class society contradictions? As Leontiev (2021) shows, is the cleavage between meaning and significance in human activity still a current phenomenon? Is the fierce struggle, using Vygotsky's (2001) words with the social environment, in the consciousness formation process still present? Does the labor social division corrupt the human personality, making us unilateral in our development, as Vygotsky (2004) denounced? Suppose the answer to these questions is affirmative. In that case, this theory, in its fundamentals, remains completely current, even if we must deal with phenomena that did not exist at the time of its developers.

Given our understanding of what actualization is, in terms of developing a theory, we will approach two essential aspects of this discussion, namely, the constitution problematic of Marxism multiples (Löwy, 1987; Mészáros, 2006) and the fact that the dispute over Vygotsky's production partly follows the same logic as the dispute over Marx's production and legacy (Séve, 2018; Tuleski, 2015; Silva, 2022; Prestes, 2014; Prestes and Tunes, 2022; Duarte, 2001).

Concerning the first aspect raised, Löwy (1987) points out that the existence of Marxism multiples results from the innumerable contradictions existing in the capitalist reality itself and from the search for its interpreters to translate them into a theory that can explain them. Part of this diversity within Marxism is expressed in the dispute over Marx's work, which brings us to the second aspect listed. Mészáros (2006) highlights how this dispute was made around the problem of alienation: based on a split between a young Marx and a mature Marx. Some Marxism theorists will reject the former - whose theoretical elaboration did not yet have the totalizing foundation of the critique of political economy - as a qualified disciple of Hegel committed to bourgeois society but still tied to philosophical humanism and idealist philosophy (expressed in the alienation concept and which would have been, according to these interpreters, abandoned by the Marx in *Capital*). On the other hand, there are those who, claiming the young Marx, marginalize the role of the critique of political economy in the dynamic analysis of social totality and end up falling into one or the other mode of politicism. The unilaterality of these positions on Marx's work is debilitating to Marx and Engel's social theory. With one, the political will of the working class, its vanguard and its intellectuals are affirmed as the driving force of social transformation, making a case for a concrete and dynamic analysis of the current stage of capitalist development, of the conjuncture in a particular social formation, etc. On the other hand, the impotence of political Praxis is asserted since the social transformation engine becomes closely identified with elements that constitute the economic basis of society. In both cases, Marx's

workbook is denied the proper dialectic of his intellectual evolution by the formalist apprehension (formal logic) of one or another moment of its production. According to Mészáros (2006), there is also an established split - a rather prevalent position among academics - between the Marx scientist of society and the Marx formulator of a communist societal project. The roles in these divisions concerning Marx's intellectual legacy express the contradictions of social praxis; in this respect, they are far from innocent.

In the section dedicated to commodity fetishism, in his mature work, *Capital*, it is essential to point out that Marx situates that phenomenon as arising from the same form of value assumed by the labor products and relates to it the abstract cult of Protestantism, as the most appropriate religious form to the dynamics of a society governed by the logic of commodities. In the same way, Marx links the possibility of surpassing fetishism (the inverted representation of social relations among individuals as if they were social relations among things) to the overcoming of capitalist society by a society of freely associated humans. From the preceding, it does not seem Marx abandoned the topic of alienation. Still, on the contrary, the conquest of the commodity fetishism concept (only made possible by the competition of the critique of political economy) allowed him to totalize the particular forms of alienation (political, religious) concerning the fundamental one involved in the value form. In his masterpiece, Marx deals with the problem of alienation more concretely and objectively than he had addressed in his debate with Bauer (Marx, 2009) and his *Economic-Philosophical Manuscripts* (Marx, 2004).

And so, Marx updates and renews his theory, following the real movement of the object to which he dedicated himself (bourgeois society), deepening and totalizing those partial apprehensions that still lack objective links with the totality that explains them (such as the alienation concept of his youth production) and organizing its most essential determinations, to overcome the phenomenal apprehensions of the object.

Tuleski (2015) demonstrated that such divisions are also very present in the dispute around Vygotsky's intellectual legacy. They created more obstacles than helped in Historical-Cultural Psychology understanding and development. As Vygotsky died young, the split between immature and mature is not present in this dispute, but rather the departmentalization of this thinker as an epistemologist, psychologist, educator, and art critic, as if there were several "Vygotskys" according to the reader's taste. Interpreters such as Newman and Holzman (2002) claim that "mine", "your", and "our" Vygotsky exists. Nothing could be more conniving with neoliberal postmodern thinking. To this, add the problem of dissemination and diffusion of Vygotsky's thought, an object of tortuous and dubious translations, the process of Stalinization in the USSR –

which resulted in the characterization of Vygotsky as idealist and anti-Marxist, for disagreeing with the canonization of official Marxism - and the double censorship that the circulation of his work suffered for approximately 20 years, both in the USSR and the West (for a pretty different reason) and the edited circulation (adulterated) of his workbooks, consisting from removing excerpts in which the Marxist foundation of his thought was evident until the complete re-elaboration of his texts, as occurred in *The Social Formation of Mind* (Sève, 2018; Duarte, 2001; Tuleski, 2015; Prestes, 2014; Silva, 2022). Sève summarizes the issue: “For the Stalinists, Marx was not sufficiently present in Vygotsky; for those American translators, on the contrary, Marx was too much evident” (Sève, 2018, p. 1).

Supporting the centrality of Marxism in Vygotski’s work cannot be done by quantifying citations and references to Marx, Engels, and the Marxism classics. By the way, this is contrary to the position expressed by Vygotsky in his famous text on psychology crisis (Vygotsky, 1996), who criticizes the method of building Marxist psychology by simply adapting the phraseology of psychological science to concepts, terms, and expressions of Marxism’s classics. For Vygotsky, more critical than bringing quotations from Marx to psychology is to apprehend Marx’s method, the way he proceeded to analyze society, to build scientific psychology from its factual material and the very logic of its object to overcome both idealism and mechanical materialism. Instead of self-proclaimed assertions of Marxism in his theory, Vygotsky dedicated himself to developing a psychological science from the investigation of phenomena concerning this field, from the review of empirical material from researchers from other countries, and from the study of psychological theories that generalized a particular set of factual material, starting from the historical-dialectical method of analysis. To Sève (2018, p. 7), “Much more than a Marxist psychologist, Vygotsky is a Marxist psychologist”.

The analysis logic used by Marx in *Capital* is an evident element in Vygotsky’s investigations and formulations for those who dedicate themselves to studying historical-dialectical materialism. However, for those who did not appropriate Marx’s writings and his internal analysis logic, which is quite common due to the lack of disciplines that address this content, especially in Psychology courses in Brazil, their understanding becomes nebulous, favoring simplifications and distortions. Without mastering the categories of the method, it becomes challenging to identify the use of analysis and synthesis, structure and process, internal/external and natural/social unity, contradiction, and overcoming, among many others linked to Vygotsky’s Marxist heritage (Sève, 2018; Tuleski, 2015; Prestes, 2014). According to Sève (2018), Vygotsky’s General Psychology is the legacy of social theory elaborated by Marx.

For historical-dialectical materialism, dividing social and personal processes is impossible. This is evident in at least five essential concepts: 1. **Productive activity** in which the human being performs his metabolism with nature; 2. **Mediation**, which explains the characteristic of the first, is an activity that differs from that of the animal due to its mediated character through the instruments created by the human being to act in nature and by the symbols that guide the behavior of others and own in the activity, giving it a social character; 3. **Objectivation**, as the result of the movement, is the external and proper nature that is altered in the process, ways of being, feeling, thinking and acting, and the work products themselves; 4. **Appropriation**, as the specificity of becoming a human being, is impossible without each singularity incorporating what has already been produced by previous generations as its inheritance; 5. **Alienation** concerns the conditions in class society that favor or prevent each singular being from realizing his potentiality, whether or not he integrates into humankind. Such concepts, as the basis of Historical-Cultural Psychology, anchor the understanding of how and under what social conditions the singular development of psychism occurs, allowing the identification of social obstacles not only to denounce but to exercise practices that affect and intensify radical processes of revolutionary transformation. Any attempts to subordinate such concepts, segment or disarticulate them from Vygotskyian psychology are due either to a gross misunderstanding of its foundations or to a purposeful attempt to make it compatible with adaptationist or conservative followers in class society.

So, we return to the question posed at the beginning of this thesis, what can guide us concerning a critical analysis of the interpretations made by the authors of Historical-Cultural Psychology who aim to “update” the theory? We indicate that the purposes for which such performances compete help us discern whether they operate a distortion or constitute themselves as continuators. We shall use Löwy’s (1987) reflections, based on Marx’s *The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte*, as a support for the conclusion of this topic, systematizing some of the ideas therein:

1) Each class develops social worldviews (superstructures) that their ideologues systematize. These worldviews correspond to ‘material class interests, but also to its social situation’ (Löwy, 1987, p.97).

2) Intellectuals possess relative autonomy concerning their class. Their situation does not necessarily coincide with the class interests to which they belong or from which they originate since the ideology they reproduce makes them representatives of a given class.

3) What defines a revolutionary/conservative ideology are not ideas taken in isolation, but a certain ‘way of thinking’, a given problematic or intellectual horizon/limit, which indicates that ideology is not necessarily a deliberate

falsification of reality but can be an illusory or self-delusory process historically constituted

From the above, we reaffirm that there is no “pure” or “neutral” philosophy or science, even when they claim to be that way. They are born into a given society and are immersed in its contradictions. The class origin of a given thinker is not the definitive marker, that is, a univocal determinant of the commitment of his theory or interpretation. It would also be simplistic to say that every science born in bourgeois society is itself conservative. On the contrary, it was the fact that it was objectively situated within bourgeois society which allowed Marx to analyze it in its essence, its movement and dynamism. Psychology, like so many sciences, was born in bourgeois society. Some of its theories have limits not because of that but because of their link (worldview and social practice) that corroborate with their maintenance. The disputes over the Vygotskian legacy also oppose the central class conceptions of the bourgeoisie, the petty bourgeoisie, the proletariat, and their fractions. Marx considered political economists classical and vulgar, but we can think of psychological theories. The analytical key lies in the very movement of the real and in the position that intellectuals assume before contradictions in the most critical moments, of convulsions or imminence of them, as we will see in the following thesis.

Thesis 3 – The only possibility of approaching theories is due to their philosophical-methodological basis

In a positive formulation, establishing the foundations that support dialogue and the critical appropriation of social and psychological formulations made from theories alien to Marxism and Historical-Cultural Psychology is necessary. The starting point of this undertaking is the recognition that Marx is the founder of a radically new understanding of the social being. Thus, his social theory is no longer in dialogue with other ideas and concepts, which is the foundation to which the investigation about any object concerning the social being must be referred, under penalty of incurring into theoretical eclecticism.

The totalizing analysis that Marx undertakes in the investigation of his object, the bourgeois society, has two fundamental characteristics: 1) his formulations are rigorously historical, that is, the essential determinations of the object and its movement must be verified; 2) his primary concern does not consist in the establishment *a priori* any method of knowledge of the object (epistemological point of view), but it seeks in the very logic and internal dynamics of the object (ontological point of view) the foundations of his rational elaboration, that is, Marx’s methodical tradition is the one that understands that it

is the very essence of the object and its attributes must condition the method of investigation, as opposed to those traditions – such as positivism, for example – imposing the method on the object and thus deforming it (Netto, 2011; Tonet, 2013). As heir to this methodical tradition, Vygotsky builds his work incorporating the categories of Marx's method, investigating the psychism of social beings existing in bourgeois order and identifying tendencies to overcome this order (in terms of investigating its object). Unlike other approaches in psychology, Historical-Cultural Psychology elaborated critical syntheses on how human beings (de)humanize themselves within social relations based on the cleavage between social classes. Born and engendered by the social revolution of 1917 in Russia, Historical-Cultural Psychology captured the contradictory trend between barbarism and emancipation and its impact on human consciousness and personality formation (Vygotsky, 2004). Vygotsky, like Marx, never detached himself from political praxis in his intellectual elaboration and the attempts to separate the founders' work of this psychology from their theoretical-political intentionality of building socialism constituted political opportunism and theoretical misrepresentation. The eclectic junctions made by those interpreters who claim that it is necessary to fill the gaps in historical-cultural theory with Piaget's genetic psychology or who invoke Vygotsky as the founder of the constructionist movement – as analyzed by Duarte (2001) and Costa (2015) – pay attention to his method and abstractly take his concepts. On the other hand, the demethodization of Vygotsky also occurs by the hand of those interpreters who, without failing to release Vygotsky his decisive link to Marxism, remove him from the construction of the Soviet socialist experience and commitment to the destinies of that revolution (Silva, 2022), either by inventing holy materialism and distinct from Leontiev's alleged mechanistic materialism, or by presenting him as an intellectual who managed to survive the regime, making concessions to it and hiding his authentic understandings about that experience. For these interpreters, Vygotsky is just another academic, a psychology theorist, and not a Marxist engaged in constructing a new science committed to building a contemporary society.

In this thesis, we reaffirm that the only way to unite conceptions, concepts and factual materials from different theoretical positions is based on their radical basis in historical-dialectical materialism. The two trends mentioned above transform Marxism into an academic theory detached from a real commitment to the construction of socialism and communism, disembodied from its *raison d'être* and, thus, make practical and deformed use of formulations and concepts coined by Historical-Cultural Psychology theorists. An essential part of the polemics surrounding Vygotsky's legacy revolves around the question of whether there is a rupture or continuity between Marx and Vygotsky (for those

who reject Vygotsky's Marxism) and whether there is compatibility or incompatibility between Vygotsky and Leontiev (for those who without leaving Vygotsky's Marxism, try to bring him closer to "true Marxism" and to characterize Leontiev as a Stalinist, distancing the former from what they indeed consider a tragic experience of humanity, the 1917 revolution). Once the problem involved in these two trends has been exposed, establishing the theoretical meaning of the need for a radical basis in historical-dialectical materialism when appropriating theories and formulations from others is convenient, as mentioned at the beginning of this paragraph.

For Lukács (2012), orthodoxy does not refer to the profession of faith concerning the Marxian work but to the rigorous use of the analysis method categories. We understand that the Historical-Cultural Psychology creators (Vygotsky, Luria and Leontiev), regardless of the events that occurred in the USSR after Lenin's death, did so. On the other hand, part of contemporary interpretations, by making the method secondary or even using it pragmatically and breaking with the perspective of totality, seek to hide an element in Marx's work and the authors mentioned above: knowledge construction committed to social revolution. The Marxian theory, the founding basis of Historical-Cultural Psychology, is a revolutionary theory insofar as it does not only propose to think about the world but to transform it (Marx, 2007).

The Marxist tradition directly denounces the capital order's exploitative character. Therefore, its secondary status plays a functional role in maintaining the capitalist logic. Such concealment is sometimes carried out openly by postmodern conceptions that have elected Marxism as their main enemy, others in a subliminal way. Formulations that appear as capitalist order criticism act for its maintenance by removing the need to destroy the bases on which the capitalist production mode is built, and which sustain the particular forms of oppression they aim to combat. The apparent criticism gives a varnish of actuality to the new/old practices put into action by capital, which affect social beings' psychism and mental health.

The use of historical-dialectical materialism necessarily means rejecting the autonomy of each branch of science or its specialization, which would translate into a Marxist psychology, a Marxist sociology or a Marxist economy. Rejecting autonomy does not mean despising the particularity of each science, as Vigostki (2000) attests when he recognizes Psychology as a concrete science of what is properly human. Let us see some of Vygotsky's (2000) fundamental postulates expressed in his *1929 Manuscript*: "Behind all the higher functions and their relations are genetically social, real relationships of people" (p. 26); "They are transferred to the personality, internalized relations of social order, the basis of the social structure of personality" (p. 26); "The individual, the personal – is not

‘against’, but a superior form of sociability” (p. 27). Next, Vygotsky (2000) paraphrases Marx stating that the “psychological nature of the person is the set of social relations, transferred inwards and which become functions of the personality and forms of its structure” (p. 27). In these excerpts, the basis from which Vygotsky starts and which is also expressed in the writings of Luria and Leontiev is explicit, for appropriation and objectivation mechanisms understanding, the constitution of higher psychological functions as an overcoming by incorporation of elementary ones, elaboration on the periodization of human development, centered on the guiding activity that promotes the new psychic formations in each period, contradictions that cross the constitution of personality (meaning and significance, motives of the movement) in class society, relation between brain and behavior, and processes of disintegration of the human psychism, resulting or not from brain damage.

Historical-Cultural Psychology, therefore, studies the singular human being. For that, analyzing the mode of production in which this human being is inserted is mister since the process of constitution of each individual occurs in the web of social relations in such a way that he carries within himself the society as a whole (Marx, 2004). The emphasis on the materiality of the capitalist production mode is necessary to oppose idealistic and ideological views of trends in Psychology, which abstractly consider the singular, taking it without mediation, without relation with the universal. Marx’s social theory, whose object is the capitalist production mode, states that the apprehension of this object in its multiple determinations involves analysis from historical totality, whose theoretical foundations reside in the Workers’ Political Economy.

There remains to be examined the (apparent) contradiction between claiming Historical-Cultural Psychology and proposing its distancing from Marx (from the most vulgar to the most sophisticated forms) or even the defense – more or less explicit – of the capitalist production mode. It is possible to point out two elements to explain this apparent contradiction, one of a sociopolitical nature and the other of a theoretical nature. The sociopolitical element refers to the class situation of most Psychology professionals and to the concrete conditions in which professional practice occurs, which takes place within the framework of confrontation with human suffering, against poverty, alienation, etc. The “social issues”, that is, the set of immediate problems posed by order of capital and in which users of their professional practice are immersed, are directly affected by the practical action of them, leading them to seek quick answers (always partial), which tend to remain within the scope of citizenship – when successful. This determined insertion, inscribed in an ineliminable daily life, can result in the disengagement of these professionals and their practices from the historical interests of the working class, such as the revolution. Even

psychology sectors claiming to use the method bequeathed by Marx do so far from the confrontations with the labor work, which provides a distance from the working-class concrete struggles. They act in the social movement but cannot transpose the method of theoretical accumulation to the action, engendering a gap between a relatively consistent academic production and a sociopolitical practice restricted to the everyday sphere.

The second element that may engender this estrangement is theoretical and is expressed in the fact that the presence of Workers' Political Economy is still almost non-existent in psychology training courses and, by extension, in its literary production. We defend that abandoning workers' political economy may lead to theoretical pragmatism. But what constitutes Workers' Political Economy or the Critique of Political Economy? According to Netto and Braz (2007), Engels defines it as the science of laws that regulate the material means of production and exchange of human beings' existence, while Lenin stresses that the Critique of Political Economy does not deal only with "production" but embraces the social relations that are constituted among human beings to carry out this production, that is, the production social structure, which is nothing other than the social totality. The processes of the Historical-Cultural Psychology study object, such as the consciousness formation as a psychism quality, and its inter-functional systems, dynamically incorporate the affect-cognition, individual-society, and biological-social units to the scope of the mentioned totality. Social relations can only explain such departments and the dynamic characteristics produced there, and the object of study of psychology is part of the Study of the Workers' Political Economy.

The estrangement, the split between political economy and psychology, has a historical explanation. In the process of bourgeois society's emergence from the entrails of the feudal world, knowledge of that production mode and the assertion of commerce and industry superiority – promoted by the development of the commercial bourgeoisie – also, on the rational level, became necessities for that class that built a world in his image and likeness. The intellectuals who expressed those materials, economic and social interests gave rise to a social theory, Political Economy, with clear objectives of social intervention, synthesizing the ideals of the revolutionary bourgeoisie in the period in which it was at the forefront of social struggles. However, the bourgeois revolutions resulted in a new class domain whose contradictions and limits soon appeared within the capitalist production mode. Unable to know the world in its entirety, under penalty of revealing the very form of its class domain and the root of capitalist exploitation, the bourgeoisie denies its emancipatory ideals and transmutes itself into a conservative class, renouncing the enlightened culture of which it had been heir, which resulted in the classical Political Economy crisis

between 1825 and 1848 (Netto & Braz, 2007). The high point of this crisis culminated with the working class rise in Europe in 1848 as a per-self class, which not only struggled for better living and working conditions but understood that its class interests were antagonistic to those of the bourgeoisie. Therefore, its realization depends on overcoming this mode of production by a socialist society. The social research of classical Political Economy, which was based on the study of the economic output, became antagonistic to the interests of the conservative bourgeoisie since it provided for investigation and demonstration of the capitalist order's exploitative character, which now had to be concealed.

The scientific findings of classical Political Economy, such as the statement that value is the work product, were taken up by the socialists. Political Economy was dissolved, giving rise to two excluding theoretical lines: conservative intellectuals named their discipline Economics and revolutionary intellectuals, Marx at the head, called the new discipline Critique of Political Economy or Workers' Political Economy. The former is constituted as a highly specialized scientific branch, markedly technical - the economic science -expurgating any historical, social and political consideration. Dealing with the various aspects of social life, highly specialized and watertight disciplines emerge, separated from each other, responding to a specific concern, definitively breaking with the totality. The latter, in which Marx elaborates, states that in social reality, rigorous knowledge is central to revolutionary action, depending directly on the truth and objectivity of theoretical knowledge. Therefore, the theory linked to the interests of the proletariat must structure a social approach that enables the apprehension of the effective movement of society (Netto, 2011) is mister. The emergence of psychology as a modern scientific subject occurred precisely from the second half of the 19th century onwards, under the historical validity of the mentioned movement above science specialization. Hence, it is not surprising that individual science – in its genesis and for a long time – has made abstraction of social relations, institutions, history, ideology, alienation and other socio-material phenomena decisive in the individuals' constitution under the capitalist production mode, treating mental functions and behavior either as special spiritual faculties without specifying their genesis, or tributing their origin to nature or the immediate environment with no historicity.

Inside the universities and in the various ideological apparatuses of social life existing in this period of the flexible accumulation of capital, two movements can be observed: 1) the movement conducted by intellectuals openly linked to bourgeois interests who spread the idea of economics as a mathematical technique, separated from social life (which other sciences would account for), and; 2) the movement performed by postmodern thought which, in Psychology, is expressed by separating psychic phenomena from economic relations, and

which calls itself progressive. But both movements, overtly or covertly, contribute to the concretization of bourgeois order interest.

The abandonment of the workers' Political Economy by Psychology is expressed when theoretical formulations take the Work category as a synonym of work in its historical form: the alienated work product of capitalist society. Thus, they deny the ontological dimension of work and the possibility that it opens up for the construction of the human race, the objective overcoming of alienated labor forms, as Mészáros (2006) points out. Contemporary bourgeois psychology, in its studies, takes this particular form of work, naturalizing it. Hence, the psychic consequences of this concrete way of being at work, the alienated and oppressed subjectivities, are naturalized. From this, practices derive aimed at adapting subjects to society and, at most, subtle criticisms of social relations, which are the generators of suffering or prevent singular development. Most theoreticians or activists do not consider the concern about breaking the subsumption from labor to capital, and the reference to class disappears in theoretical-political formulations.

In contrast, references to citizens' rights abound. Placing the discussion of class as the main thing in the planning of struggles is necessary. For this, rescuing the Workers' Political Economy to the scholars of Historical-Cultural Psychology is essential and urgent.

Establishing which working-class sectors can objectively confront and destroy capital is necessary. An adequate characterization of the working-class profile involves an analysis of the objective and subjective dimensions that affect it, under penalty of falling into politicism or mechanistic economism. Subjective factors are essential. The occurrence of the socialist revolution, overcoming the capital order without the will of concrete social subjects, the class and its perspective allies, is impossible. But objective factors are central and essential for this confrontation. Capital does not move (and therefore cannot be destroyed) for moral or ethical considerations but for economic, objective reasons.

In the capitalist production mode, both contradictions and the conditions for overcoming them are created at the same time. Such a way of exploring work makes economic crises inevitable. The antagonisms between fundamental classes (bourgeoisie and proletariat) are potentiated, a process that has consequences in all societal spheres since capital is a totalizing (and totalitarian) process. The historical approach has demonstrated that the vital interests of most human beings are incompatible with the capitalist production mode, making the tearing of this societal order imperative for humanity's existence. However, this rupture process is not automatic but "the organized political will of the laboring class to break with this order" (Netto, 1998, p. 30). For that, Historical-Cultural Psychology could well lend its efforts.

Final considerations

In this paper, we reflect on the destinies of Historical-Cultural Psychology to point out the real danger that some of the interpreters of this tradition are operating an ideo-political turn in theory - which can go from revolutionary to conservative - in the same direction of what happened to the São Paulo School of Social Psychology. The historical-cultural idea is a field of dispute through the praxis of those dedicated to continuing their theoretical elaborations as a weapon of criticism, supporting revolutionary social actions.

Vygotsky, Luria and Leontiev, the early elaborators of this Psychology, took as a base the Marxian categories of the capitalist society analysis, developing and systematizing intermediate classes aimed at studying its object: human psychism. However, this psychism could not be studied apart from social relations and could not be taken in an abstract, atomistic manner, as the other bourgeois psychological theories did. On the contrary, understanding and explaining how social relations expressed themselves in the singular psychism, discussing the implications of objective/subjective alienation in ontogenetic development, was urgent and necessary for them. The distinct social psychism shapes the contradictions of class society, which affects how the person acts. For this reason, the categories of activity, consciousness and personality are so dear to Cultural-Historical Psychology theorists.

Considering that in the stage of flexible capital accumulation, whose consequences in societal terms are the structural crisis and the intensification of ideological decadence expressed in reactionary neoconservatism, Historical-Cultural Psychology is not only current in its object and principles but also its policy purposes. Precisely because of its radically revolutionary position, the dangers of vulgarization, distortion, simplification and adaptation to a type of progressive neo-conservatism become even more hazardous. The tendency for bourgeois thought to incorporate revolutionary theories is an old phenomenon that occurred and still occurs in Marx, Engels and Lenin's writings and Vygotsky, Luria and Leontiev's Psychology field. According to Löwy (1987), this incorporation can never be radical in the sense of going to the roots of revolutionary conceptions since this would require going beyond capitalism's limits. The incorporation is achieved by obscurization, simplification and adulteration, a phenomenon which is not strictly subjective but is an objective consequence of the economic structure, which prevents the theorist, whose class position is bourgeois or petty bourgeois, from going beyond this limit.

We briefly demonstrate what happens when the bourgeoisie, in defense of its interests, appropriates Marxism and a psychological theory he inherited, such as Historical-Cultural Psychology. Incorporating it in its essence is impossible

because, in doing so, it would have to fight against itself and develop a theory that promotes actions to overcome it. Its incorporation is only possible by operating distortions in its foundations, obscuring its analyses, distorting its concepts, and splitting the authors among themselves as opponents of a personal nature or even by areas of knowledge. Such simplifications and vulgarizations thicken the chorus of relativism and irrationalism of certain scientific conceptions, including within the Psychology field, which we call a vulgar apology for capitalism. They align perfectly with the dichotomous, partial, pragmatic, practical and analogical structure of everyday thinking that thrives in common sense endorsing scientific denialism (flat earth theory, antivaccine and so on), combined or not with religious or conspiratorial conceptions.

Alienation, based on the way labor is organized in the capitalist production mode, produces harmful effects on all human life, so the struggle to overcome it is a task to be undertaken by all those with a revolutionary class perspective. For historical-cultural psychology also accomplishes this task, entering into the discussion of its object of study from the Workers' Political Economy perspective is necessary, resuming the debate on the relation of human psychism constitution - as the proper object of psychology - with the material interests (economic and social) of the laboring class, both immediate and historical. Without this, we believe understanding the assumptions and purposes of Historical-Cultural Psychology with the necessary radicality is impossible, though an essential task for those who advocate being its continuators.

And here comes the question that gives title to this article: Historical-Cultural Psychology: what is it intended for? It is destined to help construct a world where "To enjoy the best of the good is common, for anyone, whomever he/she may be" (Gilberto Gil).

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Against the superegoic community: Community psychology, psychoanalysis, and the consolidation of political communities

Nick Malherbe

Abstract

Within much community psychology, the notion of community has been deployed rather uncritically. For many community psychologists, community represents a set of characteristics that can be clearly defined or categorically known. This has material effects. When those in power claim to know what a community definitively is, they can better exercise control over what they believe it should be. Recent work in critical community psychology has, however, sought to trouble such rigid understandings of community. This work has challenged community psychologists to engage with the contradictory, psychic, and political character of communities. Situated within this critical psychology work, I draw on psychoanalytic insights in this article to conceptualise community. Specifically, I argue for Lacan's reading of the superego as a structuring principle of community. Unconscious communities, Lacan posits, are formed by those who respond to the superego's command to enjoy transgressing what he called the Law (i.e., the principles underlying social relations) in accordance with the logic of capital. I insist that the ethical task of a critical psychoanalytic community psychology is not to eradicate the superego, but to minimise its influence by making clear its obscene and unrelenting commands. This ethical task requires that community psychologists assist community activists who are involved in consolidating what I am calling *political communities*. For the political community, the subject's enjoyment is structured through sacrifice and commitment to the democratically constituted political goals of the collective, unlike superegoic transgression that demands our relentless enjoyment of capitalism. Political communities undoubtedly require transgression, but only insofar as such transgression serves an emancipatory cause.

Keywords

superego, community psychology, lack, Lacan, community, psychoanalysis

Introduction

Communities - whether they be ideological, value-driven, geographic, or political - change all the time, and yet they retain identifiable characteristics (Williams, 1975). This makes conceptualising community a rather tricky task, especially for community psychologists, for whom community has been central since their discipline's formal inception in 1965 (Dutta, 2018; Sonn, 2016). Much of community psychology has fallen into the trap of striving to delineate a community's static or unchanging coordinates so that we might better know what a community fundamentally *is* (Coimbra et al., 2012; Malherbe, 2022). This is not accidental. It speaks to the ways by which the discipline has collaborated with dominant powers that seek to 'know' communities so that they might exercise control and domination over them (Dutta, 2021). While there is certainly critical community psychology work that has troubled the notion of community (see e.g., Butchart & Seedat, 1990; Coimbra et al., 2012; Dutta, 2018, 2021; Evans et al., 2017; Heller, 1989; Kloos et al., 2012; Sonn, 2016; Malherbe & Cornell, 2022; Mannarini & Salvatore, 2019), more work is required that links this nebulous concept to a democratically constituted political project of emancipation.

Psychoanalysis, despite its usefulness in theorising unstable, contradictory concepts like community (see McGowan, 2013), remains largely absent in community psychology's engagements with and formulations of community (Caputo & Tomai, 2020). Jacques Lacan's (1988) re-reading of the Freudian superego is, I believe, an especially useful means of bringing a conceptually nuanced - and, importantly, a politicised (see Tomšič, 2015a) - notion of community into community psychology. Lacan broke from Freud in that he did not conceptualise the superego as an unspoken command to obey an omnipotent paternal figure and/or a set of cultural mores (McGowan, 2019). Rather, for Lacan, the superego commands subjects to transgress the Law (i.e., the principles underlying social relations) in accordance with capitalist logic (Lacan, 1988). Lacan's superego, in other words, is one that repeatedly demands transgression, or an obscene enjoyment of capitalism that can only be obtained through excess, unrestrained consumption, antipathy towards the Other¹, and brutally individualised competition (see Tomšič, 2015a). The Lacanian superego, I argue, affords to community psychologists a useful means of understanding how the unconscious operates to form communities whose seeming dissidence enables them to cohere with capitalism's symbolic structure all the more powerfully. When we consider the Lacanian superegoic community, I posit, the ethical task

¹ Throughout this article, I use "the Other" to refer to those subjects who have been made other through the discursive and ideological mechanisms of a racist, imperialist, and patriarchal capitalist system, a system that depends on the exploitation and even destruction of the labour, lives, and lands of the Other. The Other, we might say, is made into an other through a process of othering which relies in large part on violently divisive rhetoric (e.g., racism, sexism, xenophobia, heteronormativity) that coheres with coloniality's hierarchicalisation of being (see Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2018). Therefore, I use "the Other" somewhat differently to Lacan, who deployed this term in a rather complex, often quite confusing, manner to refer to an imagined figure or a structuring order, both of which are constructed out of material social relations (see e.g., Žižek, 2022).

of community psychology is to assist those activists engaged in constructing what I call political communities. As I will argue, although political communities undoubtedly require transgression, unlike superegoic communities, these transgressions cohere with a shared set of democratically constituted political commitments, rather than capitalism's symbolic order.

In what follows, I examine how mainstream community psychology has tended to engage with community and the problems therein, after which I consider what so-called community psychoanalysis has to say about community. I then outline Lacan's conception of the superegoic community, which I contrast with what I am calling political communities. Following this, I draw on a case example from my own community psychology work that demonstrates how a political community intervened in the superegoic command. I conclude by reflecting on what the political community and the superegoic community could mean for how community psychologists understand and engage with community in ways that break from some of the politically regressive tendencies exemplified by much of their discipline.

Community Psychology and the Problem of Community

Within community psychology, the concept of community remains in large part bound up with positivism. For most of community psychology, community is used conceptually to fix and separate the ontologies and epistemic capacities of community psychologists and the communities with which they work (Sonn, 2016). Community remains a coherent (if also multi-level) object of inquiry that can be definitively known or defined in ways that separate it absolutely from the community psychologist (Coimbra et al., 2012; Dutta, 2018). This separation, Dutta (2021) demonstrates, is not innocent. It reflects coloniality's dehumanising epistemological project that seeks to determine where legitimate knowledge can be produced and where it cannot, and thus also which lives matter and which do not (see also Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2018). For instance, delineating a fundamentally known or stable community speaks to questions of power, or who it is that defines a community and for what purposes (Kloos et al., 2012). Dominant powers can naturalise perceptions of community through definitions of what appear to be irrefutable community characteristics (Evans et al., 2017). Determining good communities from bad, for example, facilitates the exercise of control over communities, that is, the distinction between (good) communities that behave 'correctly' and in accordance with the requirements of an exploitative capitalist order, and (bad) communities that do not (see Coimbra et al., 2012; Malherbe, 2022). The 'bad' community is oftentimes an othered, ghettoised space that represents unsurpassable disadvantage, hierarchical social ordering, dispossession, brokenness, and pain – much of which can be leveraged by those in power to justify the separate development of poor, oftentimes racialised, communities (see Butchart & Seedat, 1990; Dutta, 2018; Evans et al., 2017). On the other hand, the apparent 'good' community emerges as the embodiment of consensus, connectedness, and peace, with little critical

consideration of the normative practices in this community (Malherbe & Cornell, 2022; Williams, 1975), or the reliance that these usually wealthier communities have on the underdevelopment of poor communities (Malherbe, 2022). Fanon (1967) wrote that the colonial obsession with taxonomising the world into motionless, puritanical categories represents a “Manichean delirium” that prioritises an essentialised ontology over politics. Community psychology’s unspoken designation of *known* communities into moralistic categories (‘good’ or ‘bad’) represents a delirium of this kind; confining community engagement to ‘helping’ or ‘giving voice’ while ignoring existing grassroots and community-led insurgency that seeks to destroy the structural basis of colonial capitalism’s Manichean delirium (see Dutta, 2021).

Kloos and colleagues (2012) note that community psychologists tend to understand community as a locality (i.e., a geographic area) or in terms of relationality (i.e., shared interpersonal relations). These two (oftentimes rather static) understandings of community are not necessarily mutually exclusive, evidenced by community psychology’s abiding concern with “psychological sense of community”, an influential concept developed by Sarason (1974). Indeed, psychological sense of community speaks to relationality within a particular locality. It refers to people’s willingness to enter into interdependent relations with one another, and the psychological effects thereof (McMillan & Chavis, 1986). Although useful in some respects, those who evoke a psychological sense of community tend to ignore the fact that such a concept is always remade and reconfigured in the face of broader structures of power (Dutta, 2021). As such, community psychologists’ engagements with psychological sense of community oftentimes reveal the discipline’s inclination to definitively know communities for purposes of management and control (see Coimbra et al., 2012). McMillan and Chavis (1986) appear to openly admit this when they proclaim that a psychological sense of community is especially pertinent for those in power seeking to intervene in community life (a life that, it is implied, is to remain necessarily separate from those in power). Understanding communities in terms of a psychological sense of community does not speak to those who do not fit within this conceptual frame, those who challenge it, or those who unconsciously undermine it (Dutta, 2021). Although Sarason (1974) notes that “[a] community has changed, is changing, and will change again” (p. 131), his conception of a psychological sense of community appears, for the most part, unable to adequately accommodate this important point.

It should be noted that static notions of community do not, in every instance, represent the nucleus around which community psychology orbits. There is oftentimes a tension between community psychologists who favour community (i.e., unity and coherence) and those who favour diversity (i.e., a celebration of difference) (see Neal & Neal, 2014). There have, however, been several attempts to disrupt the binary opposition between diversity and community (see e.g., Rochira, 2018; Stivala et al., 2016). Mannarini and Salvatore (2019), for example, note that community and diversity should not be understood as antithetical concepts. Instead, they should be placed in a dialectical relationship whereby ‘community’ encapsulates different community

memberships; a “community of others” (p. 30). It is, in this sense, possible to build community in ways that encourage diversity (Malherbe & Cornell, 2022). Work of this kind must strike a difficult balance between retaining a community’s definitional fluidity and ensuring that diversity does not collapse into a liberalised sort of multicultural tolerance that embraces difference only insofar as it aligns with a broader system of capitalist oppression (Malherbe & Dlamini, 2020).

Challenging how community psychology attempts to definitively know and rigidly categorise communities requires us to look beyond community psychology and towards complex and insurgent ways by which communities seek to ‘know’ themselves. Communities throughout Rojava, South Africa, Kurdistan, Palestine, and many others have demonstrated what a fluid, self-determining, and defiant community might look like. These communities identify and are identified in certain ways, but they also push back against oppressive forces that seek to fix their definitional coordinates in alignment with colonial capitalism’s imperial mandate. Such insurgent definitions of community are perhaps best understood as what Williams (1975) refers to as *knowable communities*. Although knowable communities are identifiable in several respects, the arbitrariness of these identifications is continually emphasised and contested (i.e., they are knowable rather than known), and thus how a particular community is identified can be made and remade by collective struggle. Although knowable communities take seriously people’s meaning-making practices, these communities are able to hold such practices accountable to a broader set of political commitments, and thus the knowability of these communities is contingent; always subject to the political will of the demos.

Community psychology need not abandon its various conceptions of community (e.g., psychological sense of community; locality; relationality; diversity). Instead, we should work to unmoor these conceptions from the will to *know* a community by embracing *knowable* communities (see Williams, 1975). This is, of course, a difficult task that requires rejecting moralisation and binary logic while, at the same time, remaining attentive to how conceptions of community can be mobilised to advance the kinds of critical solidarity required for a broader project of emancipation. As noted earlier, while there are several critical community psychology interventions that have taken up this task, the psychoanalytic notion of the unconscious (i.e., a kind of force within our thinking that undermines and opposes our supposedly rational wishes; Lear, 2005) remains neglected within this work. As such, we might consider what it is that community psychologists who are committed to troubling and politicising community can learn from psychoanalysis.

Psychoanalytic Conceptions of Community

It is inaccurate to proclaim that psychoanalytic thought is entirely absent in community psychology. We have seen community-engaged psychological work (some of which identifies as community psychology) adopting psychoanalytic

theories of community (see e.g., Borg, 2010; Gibson & Swartz, 2008; King & Shelley, 2008; Long, 2002; Malherbe, 2022), and there is an increasing body of work on what has been called “community psychoanalysis” (see e.g., Bruns & Barron, 2022; Clarke et al., 2006; Roehrle & Strouse, 2019). Psychodynamic and psychotherapeutic theories, in particular, have been taken up by a number of community psychologists. It is perhaps, then, more correct to note that psychoanalysis remains on the margins of community psychology (Caputo & Tomai, 2020), especially in relation to how community psychologists conceptualise community (see King & Shelley, 2008).

Community psychology’s neglect of psychoanalytic conceptions of community is somewhat peculiar when we consider that psychoanalysis has always had much to say about community². In his work on group psychology, Freud (1921) wrote about the libidinal organisation and unconscious processes at work within collectives, or what he called “the mass”. Freud’s work on group psychology has been especially influential in psychoanalytic scholarship on groups and community. This is perhaps most notable in the work undertaken by Wilfred Bion, the A. K. Rice Institute, and the Tavistock Institute (Rustin & Armstrong, 2019). Yet, even in therapeutic settings, psychoanalysts have tended to understand the clinic as a point at which different communities converge and reconstitute themselves (Bruns & Barron, 2022).

From their systematic review of psychodynamic theories in community psychology, Caputo and Tomai (2020) conclude that for most psychoanalysts, community is a complex object that, rather than forming the sum of its individual subjects, represents a constant interplay of individual components, and thus represents a series of ever-shifting tensions, power differentials, and opposing forces. This does not mean that a community cannot signify anything stable. The psychoanalytic conception of community, Caputo and Tomai (2020) insist, understands communities as governed by rules, repetition, and meaning, all of which shift with the tides of history. As such, contestations over what a community means, or the identifications that it offers, determine the possibilities for cohesion and belonging within a community (see Laclau, 1995; Malherbe, 2022). A community can thus offer subjects identifications that promise to (but cannot ever completely) overcome unconscious anxiety (see McGowan, 2013). Such identifications are significant because they need not be recognised by broader society. In fact, the identifications made available by a community are often psychically appealing precisely because they account for the values, politics, and meanings that broader society represses. A community’s identifications are nonetheless complicated. They are indicative of the dialectic between our conscious wishes for social change - the better life - and our unconscious impulses to repeat (see Caputo & Tomai, 2020). Psychoanalysis, in short, offers to us a notion of community that straddles the subjective and the objective (i.e., conscious knowledge of self, others, environment, and experience, and unconscious disruption of such knowledge – both of which are mediated by material reality).

² It should, however, be noted that psychoanalysis has, for its part, almost completely ignored community psychology.

In recent years, Eugen Koh and Stuart Twemlow have, over a series of papers, begun the work of systematically conceptualising community from a psychoanalytic perspective (see Koh & Twemlow, 2016a, 2016b; Koh & Twemlow, 2017; Koh & Twemlow, 2018). They insist that because a community is both a subjective and an objective entity, psychoanalytic theory can assist us in understanding the dynamic qualities of a community, including the individual and collective experiences of community (Koh & Twemlow, 2016a). They posit that a community

emphasizes the unconscious, collective, psychological tasks involved in creating and sustaining a community, as well as those tasks involved in it achieving its reason for being. The core psychological tasks are those concerned with the creation of bonding among a community's membership and formation of its boundary and identity. Each of these psychological tasks is underpinned by unconscious psychic processes (Koh & Twemlow, 2017, p. 270).

Koh and Twemlow (2016b) have outlined ten principles that undergird their psychoanalytic formulation of community, namely: 1) the unconscious facets of community life; 2) the social interactions, common interests, and shared symbolic systems undergirded by unconscious processes; 3) the group dynamics - large and small - that make up community life which are in flux and connected to acknowledged and unacknowledged trauma; 4) the identifications that bind individuals within a community; 5) the abstract or symbolic qualities of a community; 6) the symbolic functions of a community that are determined by individual subjects; 7) the role of intersubjective experience in forming community; 8) how symbolisation, or making sense of experience, forms community; 9) the ways people benefit from a community and how a community influences internalisation; and finally 10) the ways by which a community can be assessed in relation to its ability to facilitate a subject's capacity to relate and produce. The effectiveness by which a community embodies these principles, Koh and Twemlow (2018) propose, depends on its capacity to facilitate how people process tension and conflict, defend against anxiety, and adapt to challenges.

Within psychoanalytic work on community - as well as in the community psychology work that draws on psychoanalytic thought to understand community - the superego remains neglected. This is unfortunate given the political insights that conceptions of the superego can afford to us. Therefore, it is to the superegoic community that we must now turn, after which we will consider how political, knowable communities can combat the politically regressive tendencies of the superegoic community.

Capitalism and the Superegoic Community

The superego, like several other psychoanalytic concepts (e.g., ego, the unconscious, narcissism, the 'Freudian slip'), has entered into popular parlance, and is therefore not a wholly unfamiliar term. To invoke the superego is typically

to refer to a vague sense of personal morality or an ethical code of some sort. This is not quite what Freud meant by the term. He spoke of the superego as a kind of authority - one that is both socio-cultural and parental - which supplants itself in the psyche (Freud, 1924). Nothing is hidden from the Freudian superego, not even our thoughts. The superego is always judging the ego against an impossible ego ideal (Freud, 1930). Our striving towards this ideal is what structures our desire. Therefore, for Freud, the superego denotes a kind of libidinal authority whose judgement over us results in anxiety and determines our psychic drives (McGowan, 2013).

What does the superego mean for community? Freud (1921) theorised that people, when in group settings, turn their superego judgements over to a leader and subsequently internalise the leader's commands. By obeying the leader's commands, the individual subject is afforded a sense of security and belonging, and in this regard the superego psychically binds subjects into a community. At the same time, the sense of belonging afforded by the Freudian superegoic community is usually premised on hostility towards an outgroup which is said to pose a threat to the kinds of psychic security afforded by one's own superegoic community. The superegoic community, in this sense, attempts to secure its own identity by defining what it is not which is also what it opposes. Yet, although the superegoic community claims to oppose particular communities, it depends on these communities for its own self-identification (it *is* only through what it *is not*).

The Freudian superegoic community, while certainly finding some resonance in our contemporary conjuncture (the global rise of right-wing populism and neo-fascism come to mind here), should nonetheless be understood against Freud's particular cultural, social, and historical milieu. As Tomšič (2015b) explains, the industrial capitalism of Freud's time (which was, we must not forget, being forged during wartime) ushered in a culture of prohibition. This meant that the Freudian superegoic community required that subjects give up, postpone, repress, or lose something in accordance with their duty to a social and/or political authority of some kind (see Stavrakakis, 2007). The neoliberal capitalism of today, however, functions quite differently. Our epoch is characterised by mass consumption, continuous economic growth, and ever-expanding value (see Tomšič, 2015a, 2015b). It is in the context of this sort of capitalism that Lacan (1998) undertook his re-reading of the Freudian superego in the mid-twentieth century. For Lacan, the superego commands of the subject what he called *jouissance*, or enjoyment, which refers to an unconscious investment of pleasure into the sorts of displeasure that come from not quite fitting in with a prevailing order (Stavrakakis, 2007). We do not enjoy spontaneously (Žižek, 2022). Our enjoyment always forms part of a psychic duty to transgress. As such, the superego of neoliberal capitalism commands that we enjoy transgressing the social limit (McGowan, 2013) - or the principles underlying our social relations; what Lacan called the Law (McGowan, 2019) - in line with neoliberalism's consumptive logic. Put differently, we could say that neoliberal capitalism manages our enjoyment by demanding that we enjoy through surplus (Soler, 2014). It should, however, be emphasised that the

superego, for Lacan, is defined by its unrelenting command to enjoy rather than the attainment of enjoyment. Indeed, the enjoyment that the superego promises is non-existent precisely because it is always prohibited by the Law (Žižek, 1994). In short, then, Lacan makes clear that the superego no longer commands in accordance with prohibition, but rather in accordance with unrestrained excess. Community is then formed among those committed to the superego's command to enjoy such excess.

The Lacanian superego is unrelenting. It mocks the subject's inevitable failure to meet its impossible demands while the subject, in turn, experiences an increasing sense of guilt that stems from repressing their sinful strivings to meet the superegoic command (Žižek, 2022). Therefore, the more we give in to the superego's commands, the more it asks of us (McGowan, 2019). The continual pressure to transgress that which the superego commands (a pressure sustained by the libidinal energy of the id; Žižek, 2022) mirrors the kind of continually deferred satisfaction promised - but never delivered - by neoliberal capitalism (i.e., a satisfaction that never arrives is promised to those who work harder, consume more, produce better, eviscerate competition more completely, etc.). The superegoic command to enjoy, we might say, has ceded our enjoyment to an unending capitalistic demand to enjoy (Soler, 2014); with the true injunction of the superego being to enjoy our suffering and, ultimately, to enjoy our capitalism (Tomšič, 2015a).

Although the Law being transgressed through the superegoic command may be unjust, this is not why the superego commands transgression of the Law. It is simply transgression for transgression's sake. In other words, the superego does not command that we transgress capitalist Law to challenge or dismantle this Law, but rather to reinscribe capitalistic desire in new, seemingly subversive ways. In this sense, the superegoic command to enjoy appropriates our dissident unconscious energies; ensuring that we transgress social relations in accordance with capitalism's logic of excess (McGowan, 2019), thus securing our libidinal investment in capitalism (see Žižek, 2022). The superego cannot represent an ethical or emancipatory force because of its entwinement with capitalism. It can only produce unreflective, guilty subjects who are envious of the Other's enjoyment (McGowan, 2013). Indeed, these subjects are bound together by a paranoia of the Other's enjoyment. The superegoic community thus resists any sort of democratic ethos precisely because it is a community that positions the Other as preventing or stealing the enjoyment that was promised to community insiders (Žižek, 1994, 2022). As per the dictates of racial and patriarchal capitalism, the Other in this case usually refers to those with the least power in the capitalist order.

The Lacanian superego produces a paradoxical kind of community. Where the community of the Freudian superego invests libidinal power in the leader and thus the political project represented by this leader, the Lacanian superego invests libidinal power in the logic of capital. As such, the libido turns inwards to produce "an extreme, selfish, narcissistic individualism. The leader is no longer an authoritarian father figure, but a mirror in which the hyper-alienated, socio-pathic, self-obsessed consumer-spectators of an atomised social order see

themselves” (Faulkner, 2021, p. 57). Put differently, community is created through the subject’s adherence to a neoliberal subjectivity that commands its enjoyment of capitalist excess and a commitment to private property. Transgression of the Law can thus only assume forms that are approved by the (fundamentally capitalist) superegoic community. In this, Žižek (1994) posits that the guilt of transgressing the Law, or rather the fetishistic disavowal of guilt, creates among those within Lacan’s superegoic community a solidarity-in-guilt, which serves as the structuring principle for the psychic binds of this community.

It is because the capitalistic enjoyment for which the subject strives in obeying the superego’s command is never spoken that the superego operates on the level of the unconscious, and thus functions all the more effectively (Žižek, 1994). Therefore, we cannot do away with or entirely eradicate the superego because we cannot completely ‘settle the score’ with our unconscious (Soler, 2014). We can, however, assume some distance from the superegoic community; speaking its commands in order to weaken its psychic grip over us (McGowan, 2019). Although the superego commands that communities enjoy in accordance with capitalist excess, we can also attain enjoyment from constituent sacrifice (McGowan, 2013); from missing the absent cause of our desires (Žižek, 2022). In particular, the sacrifices required by an anti-capitalist political cause (e.g., the sacrifice of time, resources, energy, security, and/or the mythic solace of capitalist identifications) can move the subject to break from libidinal attachments to the superegoic command.

Consolidating the Political Community

With reference to decolonial praxis, Dutta considers how community psychologists might think of the community in political terms. She writes that:

[D]ecoloniality demands a radical transformation in how we think about community in community psychology—namely, abandoning notions of community as phenomenon of interest or site of inquiry/intervention to focus instead on a radical relationality capable of dismantling or rendering extraneous colonial patterns of power and relationality [and to] reclaim community as political, as resistance, in contrast to essentialist (biological, cultural, or sociological) conceptions of community, while underscoring the criticality of lived engagement with struggles (Dutta, 2021, p. 61).

Our dissident psychic energies - our unconscious drive to undermine and transgress (see Lear, 2005) - need not necessarily be appropriated by the superegoic community. Such energies can also be harnessed by political communities that create psychic binds through a shared commitment to a radically democratic political programme (see Malherbe, 2022; Mouffe, 2005), commitments that undoubtedly require sacrifice. To resist the superegoic command by reconstituting ‘community’ as a fundamentally political signifier is, of course, not to do away with the imperative to transgress the social Law. However, when transgression forms part of a political community, it is not

transgression for the sake of it. It is, instead, to transgress in the service of emancipation. Committing to a political community thus allows us to take a position relative to the superego and to determine our desires in accordance with a political project predicated on political solidarity rather than solidarity-in-guilt. Importantly, the political community is not immune to capitalist co-optation. Many formerly radical political communities have been subsumed into neoliberalism's ideological apparatuses. The political capacities of the political community must, therefore, be understood against an intersectional anti-capitalist politics which take seriously capital's racialised, gendered, heteronormative, and imperial operations.

Is there a place for Lacanian psychoanalytic theory in consolidating progressive political communities? Glynos offers some provocative, though rather non-prescriptive, remarks here:

[W]hat kind of *community* is (even theoretically) possible for subjects of the drive? What insights can Lacanian clinical theory offer us? Since a Lacanian conception of community eschews ideas of shared values or common symbolic identifications; and since it suggests that our social bond should also not be based on a common fantasmatic transgression (which makes possible a community of subjects of desire), what other ways are there of thinking a community of subjects? Indeed, is a *social* subject of the drive possible? (Glynos, 2001, p. 103, emphasis in original).

As I read him, Glynos is considering the problem of establishing a political community without a firm, fantasmatic investment (such as the fantasy of enjoyment promised by the superegoic community, a fantasy whose coordinates and constitutive desires are determined by capitalism; Žižek, 2022). What Glynos seems to point to here is the need to hold the political community's cause to a radical kind of openness that builds anti-capitalist political commitment and solidarity through what Mouffe (2005) calls conflictual consensus – an ongoing process of democratic deliberation. As such, the political community need not assume a definitive or unchanging formation, and those who comprise such a community need not resort to psychotic foreclosure nor to neurotic repression. Instead, those within the political community are compelled to hysterically question how capitalism manages our enjoyment and in so doing strive to reveal capitalism's inability to secure its promise of “an autonomous ego, one whose identity is secure in a complete self-knowledge” (Newman, 2004, p. 304). Caution must, however, be taken here precisely because the Hysteric's continued questioning of capitalism's claim to the Master's discourse³ can function in lieu of a political programme, that is, questioning for its own sake. Thus, the Hysteric's questioning discourse should lay the ground for moving into the discourse of the Analyst, whereby the limits of knowing are institutionalised within an anti-capitalist political programme (see Stavrakakis, 2007). In taking up the Analyst's discourse, the gap in how the world is symbolised is made part

³ For Lacan, discourse refers to a socio-structural position that, despite being formed through language, is not necessarily utterable (Newman, 2004).

and parcel of political efforts that seek to break from the lie of capitalist mastery by changing the world.

The radically democratic political community constantly makes and remakes itself through collective, yet agonistically conceived, fantasies of emancipation (see Stavrakakis, 2007). When we understand emancipation not as a fixed ideal but as a state of desire that is always undergoing democratic determinations, then lack - rather than excess - becomes part and parcel of our political project. Those who compromise the political community institutionalise limits (i.e., acknowledge their lack of mastery) and in this derive an enjoyment based on sacrifice (Stavrakakis, 2007), thereby opposing the capitalist logic of excess and consumption (see McGowan, 2013). Indeed, it is through lack, rather than excess, that the subject embedded within the political community can enjoy, thereby instating freedom from the superegoic obligation to enjoy excessively (Žižek, 2022).

The political community, as I conceive of it here, resembles Williams' (1975) conception of the knowable community (i.e., an identifiable rather than concretely identified community). The knowable community, unlike the known community, does not seek refuge in the University discourse, whereby knowledge is used to justify the stable 'truth' of the Master's discourse (Newman, 2004). Rather, the knowable political community is composed through the Analyst's discourse. It is a community constituted by commitments to an anti-capitalist cause, commitments that are repeatedly reformed - rather than predetermined or eternally known (see Žižek, 2022) - through conflictual consensus (Mouffe, 2005). This cause, we might say, lacks precisely because it refuses a definitive or foreclosed political programme (moving instead with the emancipatory demands of the moment). Thus, the political community's cause is knowable and democratically contingent, rather than known or fixed. It is a cause that is as desirable and enjoyable as it is politically necessary.

Community psychologists should not, however, understand the political community as one that is entirely unwilling to fix meaning. Indeed, we cannot assume an ironic distance from all meaning that claims to be completely outside of ideology (Parker, 2011). Meaning is utterly necessary for consolidating a community of any sort. As Laclau (1995) puts it, meaning is both impossible (i.e., it cannot be determined with any finality) and necessary (i.e., it is a requirement for driving emancipatory politics). Fanon (1967) argued that a kind of counter-Manichaeism, or an assertion of the liberatory good, can be important for advancing political struggle. However, he tempered this argument somewhat, proclaiming that unlike the Manichaeism of colonial capitalism, collective anti-capitalist struggle renders counter-Manichaeism a human and more complex phenomenon. If meaning within knowable political communities is fixed, it is a fixity that is partial, contingent, and always open to the radically democratic demands of emancipatory struggle. Political commitments can and should change in contexts of struggle; adapting without compromising.

The political community does not seek to offer *the* answer to the riddle of human history in the way that Marx (1844/1978) believed the arrival of communism would. Instead, by traversing democratically constituted visions of

emancipation, the political community draws from people's dissident psychic energies to advance community-led projects of emancipation (see Malherbe & Cornell, 2022). The political community, therefore, eschews the Master's discourse (i.e., it institutionalises lack and thus requires sacrifice), meaning that its psychic appeal lies in how it produces desire through continually traversed visions of collectively determined emancipation.

Case Example

While I do not believe that considerations of the superegoic community are, in every instance, essential to community psychology praxis, I do believe that engaging the superegoic community and - even more importantly - consolidating political communities - represent significant yet almost completely neglected pathways through which community psychologists can break from static conceptions of community. Turning away from the superegoic community by working with activists to consolidate knowable political communities represents a genuinely psycho-political project, one that is alive to the materiality of domination as well as the unconscious forces upon which dominant social powers so often rely. To demonstrate this argument in less abstract ways than I have hitherto, I consider in this section an example from my own community-engaged work in Thembelihle, a low-income community in Johannesburg, South Africa. Although I have analysed this example in other contexts (e.g., Malherbe, 2022; Malherbe & Cornell, 2022), I have neglected to consider its psychoanalytic valances.

In 2015, socialist activists from the Thembelihle Crisis Committee (TCC), a grassroots organisation movement, initiated a series of protests and demonstrations. The TCC was demanding that the South African state provide basic public services (e.g., sanitation, parks, housing, improved roads, clean water, electricity) to Thembelihle. It was during these protests that several protesters and, it is believed, others who were not affiliated with the protests began to steal from and even destroy some of the homes and small businesses belonging to foreign nationals living in Thembelihle. A number of foreign nationals were also physically assaulted during this time. Those enacting such xenophobia were able to pursue the capitalist logic of individualistic accumulation through transgression. The superegoic command to enjoy was, in other words, adhered to, with the excessive foundations of capitalist Law transgressed rather than challenged. Indeed, those stealing and assaulting foreign nationals were involved in transgressions that differed from the modes of political dissidence embodied by the protests coordinated by the TCC. The transgressions represented by the protests were put into the service of a broader socialist agenda, rather than a command to 'enjoy capitalism' (see Tomšič, 2015a). The point to be made here is not that those engaging in xenophobic violence were in an especially dominant societal position. They were, themselves, living in conditions of grinding poverty. We should also not psychologise their actions. Stealing from the stores owned by foreign nationals

was certainly driven in part by material need. However, it remains true that wealthier individuals were not targeted during this time. Moreover, stealing took place in conjunction with violence (several foreign nationals were assaulted), which points towards the ideological - rather than the merely opportunistic - character of such xenophobia. The common struggles faced by those comprising the xenophobic superegoic community and foreign nationals were obscured by the superego's hyper-individualised command to enjoy.

The xenophobia exhibited in Thembelihle at this time is not anomalous in South Africa. Poor foreign nationals living in the country regularly incur blame for centuries of colonialism as well as the contemporary crony capitalist state (see Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2018). Several prominent politicians and news media personnel have, over the years, perpetuated such divisive xenophobic sentiments (Neocosmos, 2008). Like other incidents of xenophobic violence in South Africa, those occurring in Thembelihle during the 2015 protests received considerable coverage in the South African media, oftentimes in an attempt to delegitimise the protests (Malherbe, 2022). Yet, the manner by which the TCC intervened in these xenophobic attacks, taking direct action to stop them, received virtually no media coverage (this kind of neglect on part of the South African media is a commonplace strategy of making state-led, oftentimes brutally violent, police interventions appear legitimate; Malherbe, 2022; Neocosmos, 2008). Despite the political traction it was gaining, the TCC suspended its protests in order to work with foreign nationals to ensure that that which had been stolen from them was returned. Later, TCC members collaborated with foreign nationals to host a series of community events that aimed to promote cohesion and solidarity within the community (Tselapedi & Dugard, 2013). It was only after the safety of foreign nationals in the community was guaranteed that the TCC resumed its protest activities.

Incorporating the struggles of foreign nationals into TCC's political purview altered not only how the TCC undertook political action, but also expanded the emancipatory fantasies ungirding this action. Fantasies of emancipation were emboldened and rendered more ambitious by attending to and making connections between a multitude of struggles. In this, the TCC did not offer coherent or definitive identifications to those aligning with its political agenda. Instead, the TCC sought to facilitate a space within which people could democratically negotiate - and agonise over, in a collective fashion - how they would action their fantasies of emancipation (Malherbe & Cornell, 2022). The political community thus ensures that fantasies of liberation were shaped by and held accountable to the struggling collective, thereby reconstituting the political through the human (see Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2018).

Soon after the protests, I - along with several colleagues at the University of South Africa's Institute for Social and Health Sciences - worked with TCC activists, foreign nationals, and others in the community to produce a documentary film that participants titled *Thembelihle: Place of Hope*. Much of this film focused on the TCC's anti-xenophobic interventions rather than the xenophobia which had preoccupied most media reporting at the time. At a series of public screenings of the film (e.g., in community halls, at community events,

and in several commercial districts throughout Johannesburg), TCC activists presented their political work, emancipatory projects, and underlying fantasies of liberation to different audiences. It was at these public screenings that TCC activists fostered avenues of solidarity with workers, community members, and other activists facing similar struggles and who were committed to a comparable (although not identical) anti-capitalist programme. As community psychologists, we were invited by community members to assist with facilitating some of these public screenings. However, the TCC also screened the film at several political meetings which we were prohibited from attending. The consolidation of the political community may very well be hindered by psychology (and its assumptions of mastery) or the presence of psychologists (see Parker, 2011). Community psychologists must remain in constant dialogue with activists so that they are aware of what their role should and should not be within this consolidation process.

It may be argued that the xenophobic superegoic community operating in Thembelihle at this time also enjoyed a sacrifice of sorts (e.g., sacrificing good standing in the community). However, such a sacrifice was always held accountable to the superegoic command to enjoy in excess. In other words, the superegoic community moved through sacrifice in order to enjoy excessively. This was not the case with the TCC, whose sacrifices were held accountable to its socialist commitments – a sacrifice in service of an emancipatory cause. Thus, at public screenings of *Thembelihle: Place of Hope*, the TCC as a political community structured enjoyment by appealing to the kinds of sacrifices, fantasies of liberation, and commitments required to advance political struggle, rather than a command to enjoy excessively *a la* the xenophobic superegoic community.

Our particular community psychology intervention was not concerned with consolidating TCC's political community from scratch. This work was already taking place to remarkable effect. Community psychologists are instead to work with members of political communities to advance their struggles in self-determined ways. Work of this kind may involve working with political communities to communicate their politics to new publics - as was the case at the public screenings of *Thembelihle: Place of Hope* - or it may involve community psychologists drawing from available resources to assist activists in ways deemed politically useful by activists themselves (e.g., making available psychological services to those experiencing trauma or burnout; facilitating political meetings; counselling; providing transportation; assisting with access to venues; mediation). This is especially important in places like South Africa where grassroots struggles for liberation are repeatedly silenced, repressed, or brutally suppressed. In short, community psychologists who wish to assist in consolidating political communities (and thus contribute to efforts that turn away from the commands of the superegoic community) must be guided by the emancipatory requirements articulated by political communities themselves.

Conclusion

Without community there is no liberation, only the most vulnerable and temporary armistice between an individual and her oppression. But community must not mean a shedding of our differences, nor the pathetic pretense that these differences do not exist (Lorde, 2017, p. 18).

Formalised community psychology has struggled to break from static conceptions of community (i.e., community as a geographic locale or community as a binding set of values; Kloos et al., 2012), and has sought to know the community definitively, thereby lending itself to projects that seek to control and manage communities in accordance with capital accumulation (Malherbe, 2022). Many critical community psychologists, unsatisfied with how community has been engaged by so many within their discipline, have sought to stretch and expand the notion of community by engaging with it as a complex, ever-shifting site of political interests, affective interactions, and material mediations. In this article, I have sought to contribute to this critical community psychology work by drawing from the Lacanian conception of the superego to understand how unconscious mechanisms psychically bind people into a community defined by a mode of transgressive yet essentially capitalistic enjoyment. It is against these superegoic communities, I argue, that community psychologists can work with activist groups to consolidate political communities through which different struggles can find expression and where solidarity can be established via an agonistic democratic process, one that structures enjoyment through sacrifice and commitment.

In the *Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts*, Marx (1844/1978) argues that individuals are free only when their nature is owed to themselves; when their sources of life, creativity, energy, and reproduction are not determined by or sold to others. This situation, Marx argues, produces communities of things rather than communities of people. He was referring here to the material circumstances of labour under capitalism, however, there are surely also psychic effects engendered by these circumstances. These psychic effects should not be ignored by community psychologists committed to an intersectional anti-capitalist politics. When we take seriously the superego, we take seriously how the community of things co-opts our unconscious, dissident energies to advance a neoliberal rationality based on excess, hyper-individualisation, and consumption. A critical psychoanalytic community psychology need not only consider the kinds of unconscious mechanisms that structure community life. Work of this sort should also strive to make itself of use to political communities that redirect people's dissident psychic energies into the realisation of a humanistic community that breaks from the community of things. Such political communities are of course not shorn of unconscious desire, but they can offer us the psychic tools needed to impede the superego's unrelenting command to enjoy capitalism.

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Critical psychologies of climate change and the politics of temporality

Andreas Vavvos

Abstract

Psychologists and social scientists have been impelled to generate more comprehensive conceptualizations of socio-ecological systems as a result of the recent surge in environmental research, the outbreak of the pandemic, and the urgency of climate change. This paper suggests that the temporal theorizing of psychosocial phenomena is an approach psychologists can employ to deal with impending crises, address the terminological cacophony in environmental studies, and advance conceptual clarity. The paper starts off with a critique of mainstream psychological and social science approaches that tend to portray psychosocial phenomena as mostly immutable, static, unchanging, and unaffected by politics. A presentation of the ethnographic research conducted in Western Macedonia and Crete (Greece) ensues. The empirical part explores two distinct temporal orientations associated with the energy transition in Western Macedonia and Crete: the energy future as the perpetuation of an unjust past and as a violent rupture. In the last section, the paper ties the research results to broader anthropological, sociological, and psychological literature, while considering how temporal approaches may aid us in addressing the ongoing endeavors to depoliticize climate change.

Keywords

critical psychology, climate change, temporality, energy transition, Greece

Introduction

The climate disaster fills us with viruses that swarm over us, but you do business with medicines and turn vaccines into commodities. You will be proposing that the market will save us from what the market itself has created. The Frankenstein of humanity lies in letting the market and greed act without planning, surrendering brains and reason. Kneeling human rationality to greed. *Gustavo Pedro, President of Colombia, General Assembly of the United Nations (UN), Tuesday, September 20, 2022*

"If all you have is a hammer, then everything looks like a nail," is the proverb that best summarizes psychological experts' position on the climate question. Psychology circles have largely concentrated on the same study topics (mental health resilience, etc.), methodological frameworks (online quantitative surveys, etc.), and therapeutic techniques (positive psychology, cognitive-behavioral treatment, etc.) when addressing ecological threats like the recent pandemic¹. Similar assertions have been made by certain early-career researchers regarding the field of management. Outlining their personal aspirations for the field of sustainability management, these researchers contend that sustainability issues have not transformed the discipline's core principles, but have just been sketchily incorporated into current conceptual frameworks and methodologies (Baudoin et al., 2022). In a similar vein, the emergence of climate change could have supplied psychologists with an unprecedented opportunity to review and revise their axiomatic principles and theoretical frameworks, spur them to conceptualize human-nature and multi-species relations in more emancipatory ways, and urge them to critically respond to the numerous and escalating crises that have beset the discipline for more than a century (for the crisis in psychology, see, e.g., Sturm & Mülberger, 2012).

Regretfully, the discipline has not yet taken on the task of effectively combating climate change. As a Ph.D. candidate at a Department of Psychology researching energy futures and collectives, I am constantly frustrated and perplexed by the fact that all of my peers and colleagues work on "traditional" and supposedly more "legitimate" micro-level psychological phenomena like behavioral disorders, attention deficit hyperactivity disorder, parental rejection, emotional regulation, illness representations, and so forth. I personally feel uneasy and anxious every time I am asked to explain how a project on energy studies is housed under the Department of Psychology in Crete, but I harbor the hope that this subjective positionality of pariah might upend the outward harmony and order that prevail in Psychology Departments. This portrayal of critical environmental psychologists as misfits and outcasts does not comprise just a personal, auto-ethnographic, or impressionistic view. Despite the recent expansion of the environmental psychology literature (Adams, 2021; Değirmencioğlu, 2022; Räthzel & Uzzell, 2019), data indicate that there are relatively few papers on climate change and global warming in APA and non-APA psychology journals (American Psychological Association, 2022). Mainstream psychology has a tendency to glaringly overlook macro-aspects of the socio-economic systems and to misrepresent systemic contradictions as individual pathologies and failures (Evans et al., 2017; Mentinis, 2013). Therefore, it is hardly unexpected and unanticipated that there has been a chronic

¹ This scathing opening statement applies to philosophical thinking as well. Giorgio Agamben's and Slavoj Žižek's responses to the pandemic were entirely distinct, which may be indicative of how environmental and social phenomena are conceptualized—as transformative forces or as instruments for bolstering pre-existing frameworks. Giorgio Agamben, one of the sharpest-minded European intellectuals, in his hastiness to (mis)apply his own approach to interpret government measures to the coronavirus pandemic, has partly failed to illuminate facets of the social landscape that do not fit with his own research agenda (Agamben, 2021). Unlike Agamben, Slavoj Žižek (2022) asserted that the pandemic is a transformative force that has shaken the world, with influential neoliberal political figures now proposing measures that flagrantly violate all of the market's so-called "natural laws."

lack of attention directed to the structural causes of climate change (Adams, 2021).

This paper advances the argument that it is of the utmost importance for environmental psychologists to thoroughly investigate the temporal character of psychosocial phenomena that are associated with climate change. Psychology and other social sciences should reconsider their core epistemological assumptions and give temporality and the climate issue more serious consideration. The paper's thesis goes beyond simple theoretical pursuits; instead, it mostly draws on the daily struggles of an emerging academic precariat. In a neoliberal academic context, as psychologists, we are obligated to work as researchers in various environmental research programs in order to afford expenses and live within our means. Several of these projects uncritically advance hegemonic conceptual frameworks that do not quench our thirst for knowledge about the underlying causes of climate change and the pressing need to investigate alternative viable futures². The present contribution to the call for papers, *Critical Psychology as Politics by Other Means*, was driven primarily by this paucity of structural opportunities for exploring the potential of critical psychologies of climate change.

The paper is set up as follows: The first section focuses on a critique of how traditional conceptual paradigms in environmental social sciences and environmental psychology address politics. The next section examines how social sciences and psychology have investigated the temporal and future facets of human agency and how this relates to politics. The methodology of the paper, based on ethnographic findings, is discussed in the part that follows. The empirical part explores two distinct temporal orientations: energy future as the perpetuation of an unjust past and as a violent rupture. The paper culminates in tying the research results to broader anthropological, sociological, and psychological literature, while considering how temporal approaches may aid us in addressing the ongoing endeavors to depoliticize climate change.

Mainstream Environmental Approaches and the Depoliticization of Climate Change

Systematic efforts to conceal the political implications of climate change persist in traditional fields of study as well as mainstream psychology. Three brief examples will be enough to demonstrate how the political facets of climate change are being repressed by traditional social sciences. The first relates to the notion of the Anthropocene, which sparked controversy when it was first

² These dominant theoretical models frequently obscure and mystify our day-to-day experiences with housing insecurity, energy poverty, precarious employment, burnout, the mental health epidemic, xenophobia, class, gendered and racial inequalities, rising university tuition costs, redundancies, militarism, and eco-anxiety. The challenge is that research programs in critical (environmental) psychology receive much less funding than those in traditional fields of psychology. Under these circumstances, academic employment in research initiatives that support precepts and theoretical tenets that clash with critical psychological conceptions of human agency and appear to be completely detached from the experiences of the subaltern classes is a one-way street for some of us.

proposed a few years ago. Since then, the term has drawn criticism for perpetuating the notion of human exceptionalism by naming an entire geological epoch after our species. Additionally, assigning equal culpability to all human beings or abstractly responsabilizing the species *Anthropos* appears to conceal and disguise the capitalist relations that contributed to the degradation of ecosystems (Moore, 2016). This flawed and problematic framework has even crept into critical environmental psychological research (Adams, 2020). As is unfortunately always the case, more dynamic conceptual frameworks like those of the Capitalocene (Moore, 2016) or the Cthulucene (Haraway, 2015) have remained confined to academia and never attained the level of popularity of the Anthropocene paradigm³.

The WEF (Water, Energy, Food, and Ecosystems) Nexus framework, which seeks to conceptualize and explain the linkages and interrelationships among natural resources, is yet another instance of how ambiguous the terminology in environmental social sciences can be. The emergence of this theoretical framework has urged researchers to work collaboratively and explore the complexity of socio-ecological systems in very dynamic ways. In vulnerable regions, like Crete (Greece), which in the future are going to suffer from decreasing water reserves, more frequent meteorological and hydrological droughts, and less frost (Georgoulas et al., 2022; Tapoglou et al., 2019), nexus studies that capture the complicated interplay between socio-political and environmental systems are of utmost importance (Canessa et al., 2022). However, an insightful critique of the concept has revealed that it comprises a depoliticized framework that capitalizes on the naive belief that the market and technology are the only forces capable of resolving the looming and impending environmental and social crises. The concept seems to mask the power disparities involved in the management and utilization of natural resources, to disguise essentially political issues as technical ones by subscribing to mainstream discourses of the "technical quick fix," and to reinforce conventional assumptions in neoclassical economics (Allouche et al., 2015; Müller-Mahn et al., 2022).

Like other traditional social sciences, mainstream psychology is reluctant to acknowledge how politics permeates all of our interpersonal interactions (Parker, 2007). This depoliticization of the political sphere in psychology becomes apparent in the recent report of the APA task force on climate change. The report unquestionably comprises a positive development and initiates a dialogue on the role of psychology in times of climate change (American Psychological Association, 2022). The report examines a wide range of additional contributions that psychologists can make to address the effects of climate change and makes the case that mitigation (how carbon emissions can be reduced) and adaptation (how people can adapt to climate change) are the main responses to climate change. It is evident that the necessity of climate change adaptation and mitigation should not be understated. However, the study makes no mention of

³ The focus of this paper does not allow for a thorough analysis of these theoretical frameworks. It is sufficient to note that academics have also criticized the theoretical underpinnings of the Capitalocene and Cthulucene's approaches. For a critical analysis of Moore's body of work, for instance, see Foster and Angus (2016).

the causes of climate change, and the brief and cryptic references to fossil fuel combustion and carbon emissions are insufficient. The research glosses over the factors behind climate change and the urgent necessity of switching to an entirely different socioeconomic system.

Değirmencioglu (2022) who reviewed the psychological literature on climate change, similarly concluded that the causes of climate change are rarely covered, with the emphasis instead being persistently placed on its psychological impact. This marked reluctance of psychologists to take on the causes of climate change indicates that the discipline misses the opportunity to align with Roy Bhaskar's (2009) radical vision of the emancipatory social sciences as forms of explanatory critique that seek to eliminate the causes of oppression and the sources of the mystification of reality. According to Bhaskar (2009), explanatory critique is "the kernel of the emancipatory potential of the human sciences" (p. 121). Without the requisite conceptual rigor and theory development that shed light on the extractive logic and oppressive arrangements that caused climate change in the first place, psychologists cannot rise to the occasion.

The report's overall tenor implies that psychology is a benevolent academic discipline and professional practice that, among other things, should "educate the general public" on the psychological aspects of climate change (American Psychological Association, 2022, p. 10) and "help people to adjust to the impacts of climate change" (American Psychological Association, 2022, p. 9). This academic "air of messianism" that reflects the pomposity of scientists and their unwavering belief in the superiority of academic knowledge has been harshly criticized (Freire, 1994, p. 79). The general public is portrayed in the report as passively consuming information about climate change, and the distinction between the active agents (psychologists) and the recipients (the general public) of knowledge is upheld without giving it any serious consideration, as if knowledge and research are the monopolies of academia (Fals-Borda, 1987). Unsurprisingly, this approach is prevalent in mainstream environmental psychology, where "the attention focuses on potential levers to the correction of individuals' errant behaviour by scientists and politicians who believe to have a clear knowledge of how individuals should behave" (Räthzel, & Uzzell, 2019, p. 1386).

These short introductory remarks are meant to convey the main point that conceptual fuzziness has stymied the progressive potential of the shift to more equal and sustainable societies. In light of these developments, it is not an overstatement to suggest that prevalent environmental ideologies have contributed considerably to the obfuscation and mystification of the material reality of climate change. The links between politics, theoretical frameworks, and power asymmetries need to be further explored by psychologists and social scientists. In this regard, I concur with Räthzel and Uzzell (2019), who call for a critical environmental psychology that provides conceptual frameworks for people to attain self-liberation. Rather than conceiving climate change as another area that must be colonized and invaded by traditional social sciences and mainstream psychology, one could regard it as a transformative force that shakes and rocks our theoretical foundations. As time is a terrain of political

struggle and conflict and a site in which power relations arise and emerge (Gokmenoglu, 2022), the remainder of the paper explores how temporal theorizing is a crucial tool for halting this rapidly accelerating depoliticization of climate change.

Temporal and Future Orientations in Contemporary Social Sciences

Despite the fact that "climate change is intrinsically about time and temporality, but in a number of different ways" (Kverndokk & Eriksen, 2021, p. 1), psychologists interested in climate change temporalities confront the unfortunate fact that mainstream psychological approaches have obscured and concealed the temporal, futural, and utopian aspects of human agency. The vast majority of psychological frameworks are marked by a notable lack of temporal conceptualization of psychosocial processes. As a corollary of its excessive reliance on linear epistemologies and the variables approach, "timeless psychology" has been ineffective in explicitly incorporating temporality, the lived experience of time, as a key element of psychosocial phenomena and articulating their futural components (Sools & Mooren, 2012; Tateo & Valsiner, 2015). Although temporality is a key component of psychopathology, contemporary psychiatric approaches, mired in quantifying mental distress, have failed to explain it as a socially grounded, qualitative, and intersubjective phenomenon (Moskalewicz & Schwartz, 2020). In a similar vein, modern theories of cognitive psychology have regarded cognitive processes primarily as spatial phenomena while overlooking their temporal and enduring nature (Vogel et al., 2020), while psychological approaches like those of Bandura and Adler appear to be confined by a Western linear temporality and back the notion that human agency always conforms to prevailing cultural standards (Sools & Mooren, 2012, p. 207). Freudian psychoanalysis has also received criticism for being mired in an archaeology of the subject and obscuring the novel contents of psychological processes (Bloch, 1996; Marvakis, 2007).

The social sciences have a long history of under-investigating temporal and, in particular, future-focused categories; therefore, this issue is neither recent nor unique to psychology. Pink and Salazar (2017), for instance, have put forward a similar argument regarding how anthropologists tend to disregard the future: "Anthropological method itself is embedded with a past orientation, and the theoretical canons of the discipline have not accommodated

a future-focused shift" (p. 6). With a few notable exceptions, the dominant philosophical discourses of modernity and the entire Western philosophical enterprise up until Marx had generated future-focused conceptual tools that were poorly and vaguely developed (Bloch, 1996). The discussion regarding the future has, in general, been dominated to this point by positive psychology-based discourses that place a strong emphasis on the controversial idea of resilience (Kleist & Jansen, 2016, p. 383). Neoclassical economics, which lays a great focus on advanced statistical techniques, prediction, and probabilistic thinking, has likewise dominated mainstream discourses (Appadurai, 2013). In order to

construct energy futures that serve as moral frameworks, financial metrics and conventional economic models are frequently deployed (Field, 2022), and scientists working on the WEF (Water-Energy-Food) environmental approach have blatantly favored quantitative techniques (Albrecht et al., 2018). The point raised here is not anti-quantitative, but as Parker (2007) so aptly remarked, critical psychologists are reasonably skeptical about the stifling quantification of our daily lives.

Utopianism, a potentially fruitful notion that captures agents' aspirations and visions for the future, has likewise been relegated to the margins of social theory. The utopian philosopher Ruth Levitas (2013) has described the persistent hesitancy of social scientists to integrate utopian thought into their research agenda. Levitas has claimed that the sociology of the 20th century was established as a legitimate scientific discipline by excluding utopian thought and perpetuating assumptions that regard science and utopian thinking as two mutually exclusive projects (Levitas, 2013). One major factor contributing to the decline of utopianism has been Karl Popper's criticism. Popper asserted that "utopian engineering" has a highly implausible end result and calls for the complete reconstruction of societal institutions, without anybody being able to guarantee that all these sacrifices and sufferings of the people will not be in vain (Popper, 2003). The concept has been consigned to the periphery of traditional social philosophy despite the emergence of promising reconsiderations of it, such as Wright's Real Utopias (Wright, 2010) and the critical realist notion of Concrete Utopias (Archer, 2019). This is largely owing to the fact that utopias were inextricably linked to the totalitarian regimes and the atrocities of the 20th century (Wegner, 2013).

For psychologists keen on examining future orientations, hope is another promising concept. According to Bryant and Knight (2020), hope is "something that doesn't presently exist but potentially could; hope is based on more than a possibility and less than a probability" (p. 134). "In these unquestionably anti-utopian times," as Rafaella Baccolini (2013, p. 161) has called our era, future orientations like hope are largely confined to the realm of the individual and primarily understood as an atomized and private capacity (Thompson, 2013). We live in critical times, when collective and social hopes that challenge the foundations of our societies are in full retreat. In this context, mainstream psychological approaches, along with market-driven discourses, aggressively infiltrate all of our social relationships and solidify a therapeutic ethos that depoliticizes and privatizes our emotional experiences (Illouz, 2007). Theoretical frameworks, analytical approaches, and methodological designs in mainstream environmental psychology subtly incorporate this prevailing notion of the privatized individual (Räthzel & Uzzell, 2019). Hope has been partially converted to a commercial and consumerist activity restricted to the private sphere, as specific atomistic futural visions become dominant and sideline collective ones; the hope for an ideal body that complies with current beauty standards or for a plastic and flexible brain with unlimited potential, if the person adopts self-enhancement and brain-enhancement practises (Pitts-Taylor, 2010), are relevant examples here.

In the empirical section that ensues, I make an effort to demonstrate that sweeping social processes like the energy transition stimulate temporal thinking. The anthropological literature from South Europe, which demonstrates how the various crises that have wreaked havoc on those countries have spurred temporal thinking, is crucial in this regard (Bryant, 2015; Knight, 2015; Knight & Steward, 2015). Knight and Steward (2017) have summarized this argument by claiming that "crises stimulate temporal thought (temporality), whether tilted in the direction of historicizing, presentifying, futural thought, or some combination of these possibilities" (p.2). The paper is aligned with Kverndokk and Eriksen's call (2021) to investigate not only how climate change temporalities are conceptualized as an abstract geological and historical condition, but also how vernacular discourses and human experiences are attached to these temporal structures. In the final section, I attempt to tie everything together by exploring how and why temporal theorizing can be a strategy we might employ to cease the depoliticization of climate change.

Methodology

The ethnographic data came from participant observation, field notes, casual conversations, and interviews conducted from 2020 to 2023 with local citizens, coal miners, and energy union members who oppose the energy transition in Western Macedonia and Crete (Greece). The study is still in progress. The majority of my conversation partners are middle-aged and come from Greece. Even though I mention several occasions with different informants, my main focus here is on my long-standing friendship with Stefanos and Alexis (pseudonym). Stefanos, a pensioner and a former coal miner, presided over the Labour Solidarity Union of Workers in the lignite mines in Western Macedonia. He is a founding member of the informal collective Energy-Environment SOS Western Macedonia and a regional councilor in Western Macedonia. Alexis, is one of the founding members of the Citizens' Committee of Ierapetra, a group established in 2018 to coordinate local residents' opposition to the installation of wind turbines.

Through the operation of lignite mines and power plants, Western Macedonia served as Greece's energy hub for several decades. Due to the mandate to decarbonize the Greek economy by 2028, the region is at the forefront of discussions concerning ecological and labor transitions. The privatization of the Power Public Company and the precarization of labor relations have raised concerns about the region's future prosperity. The town of Ierapetra is located on the southeast coast of Crete and was chosen as a case study due to the fact that the installation of four 90-meter wind turbines near an archaeological monument has sparked controversies. My research is located at the collaborative intersection between social anthropology and critical psychology, exploring how diverse social groups (miners' trade unions, energy communities, and environmental groups) construct their futures in an interconnected global sector (energy). I am concerned with a better

understanding of human agency, particularly futural anticipation and utopian thinking. In this case, my primary focus is on investigating how energy transitions impact how people experience time.

This study may be referred to as "anthropology at home," as I was raised in Kozani, Western Macedonia, and have since lived in Rethymno, Crete. This phrase has been employed by anthropologists in recent years to indicate the shift in the ethnographic focus from "exotic" and far-off societies to their own communities. Anthropologists confront unique challenges when doing their research at home, since it can be complicated to defamiliarize the familiar and thoroughly interrogate the cultural and linguistic similarities they share with their interlocutors (Jackson, 1987). The research project was approved by The School of Philosophical, Anthropological and Film Studies Ethics Committee (SEC) of the University of Saint Andrews on May 24, 2022 (approval Code: SA16261) and by the Research Ethics Committee of the University of Crete (REC-UOC, A.P.129/22.08.2022).

Energy Future as Perpetuation of an Unjust Past

The notion that Western Macedonia's energy transition reproduces and reinforces the repressiveness and corruption of the country's existing political institutions has been strengthened by the association of the transition with controversies over clientelism, violence, and corruption. An event that was recently revealed and generated heated debates in the local communities is the fact that the three daughters of Vasileios Michelakis, the Secretary-General of the Decentralized Administration of Epirus and Western Macedonia, were partners and managers of the energy firms Kleia Power Energy, Efour Green Power, and MM PV Power in Western Macedonia. A story with the startling headline "The father grants land for his daughters' photovoltaic panels" was published in the local newspaper *Proinos Logos* (Morning Talk) ("Mana Nerou for the three daughters", 2021). Given that the Decentralised Administration of Epirus and Western Macedonia distributes licenses for renewable energy projects, his family members' engagement in energy enterprises has raised ethical concerns. The disputes centered on a location known as Mana Nerou in Messiani Kozani (Western Macedonia). The region had been declared a protected area of "Macedonian oak forest," which barred the installation of solar and photovoltaic panels ("Macedonian oak forest the disputed area", 2021). Licencing these renewable energy projects was viewed as a violation of the prevailing land use system in the area as well as an action that jeopardized the preservation of the surrounding ecosystems. The mayor of Kozani, the capital of Western Macedonia, Lazaros Maloutas, was also involved in this controversy. His nephew, Ioannis Maloutas, is the manager of the private company Coenergy and his daughter, Alexandra Malouta, is a partner in the business ("Mana Nerou and for the daughter", 2021). It has been debated if there are conflicts of interest in this case because of their involvement in this photovoltaic energy company, and it has also been questioned whether the mayor's family members' business ventures are morally

acceptable. The local city council met to debate the issue, and a variety of opinions were voiced regarding the morality and legality of these activities (Conference Hall Coventareio, 2021).

The first to bring up this topic in our conversations and associate it with temporality was Stefanos, a retired coal miner and member of the left-leaning trade union Labour Solidarity. Stefanos has been actively rallying local communities in Western Macedonia against the current energy transition. He is a critical friend and co-researcher who continually ponders how the dominant energy present and future reinforces and perpetuates an unjust past. For instance, when Greek prime minister Kiriakos Mitsotakis recently visited Western Macedonia to inaugurate a new photovoltaic park, there were violent skirmishes between the police and the local social movements that "welcomed" the prime minister. Stefanos was reminded of the 1990–1992 riots, when the father of the current prime minister, Konstantinos Mitsotakis, visited the area and ordered police to beat coal miners. There is a third Mitsotakis family member involved in the energy transition field. The sister of the prime minister, Alexandra Mitsotaki, is in charge of ELPO/ISD and Convergencies' collaborative initiatives to secure public support for renewable energy initiatives and defuse opposition to the transition. The transition, which was associated with familism, did not appear to transform people's values and attitudes; rather, it tended to re-establish the underlying ambiguities of Greek politics.

As Stefanos and I collaborated to write a paper about the environmentalism of the trade union, I realized that the word transition I kept using was perplexing to him. Despite the fact that we chose to keep the phrase "(un)just transitions" in the title of our paper, we both agreed that union members would not use it in other contexts, as they would not conceptualize contemporary transition as a shift or a change, but mainly as a perpetuation of the past (Vavvos & Prassos, 2023). The group Stefanos supports for the regional elections in October 2023 presented its proposals on energy in Western Macedonia in the aftermath of the recent national elections, which yielded a negative outcome for the radical social movements. The notion of an energy transition to renewables was harshly questioned in a handout that contained the group's theses on energy in Western Macedonia: "The so-called transition, contrary to what they claim, is not from lignite to renewable energy but rather from lignite to natural gas, which has since been supplanted by LNG." Green transition is negatively associated with words like *έγκλημα* (crime), *απάτη* (fraud), and *ψέμα* (lie) in the majority of the energy protests and demonstrations in Western Macedonia in which we have taken part with Stefanos. For instance, during a recent demonstration against the installation of renewables in Anatoliko Eordaias (Western Macedonia), which was primarily organized by energy workers and trade unions, workers and locals sang in time to the workers' cries, "Green transition is a fraud, the right of the worker is the law." They regarded the transition towards a greener economy as integral to a long-standing political system that is hostile to the interests of the working class and local communities.

In the paper that Stefanos and I published, we presented the argument that, for his trade union, both the working conditions in the lignite mines and the

deindustrialization process in Western Macedonia are noxious and detrimental to the working class and the local ecosystems. No matter which energy source is used in each context, the prevailing economic system is seen as one that depletes the environment and endangers workers. The transition is viewed as an expansion of the neoliberal policies that have been imposed on the nation over the past several decades, particularly in response to the economic crisis that has only served to deepen citizens' mistrust of the political system as a whole. For some of my interlocutors in Western Macedonia, the region's energy transition is connected to the persistence of neoliberal politics, the maintenance of a corrupt political regime, the long-standing repression of coal miners' protests, and the continuation of politics as a family affair⁴.

Energy Future as Violent Rupture

"One of our aspirations is to create a space where conditions like autism can be treated by people trained in equine-assisted therapy," Alexis remarked as we sipped coffee overlooking the Cretan Sea in Ierapetra. Alexis had worked in a variety of professions while living in other cities; however, the austerity measures and the urban way of life appeared alienating and taxing to him, and he was one of several citizens who decided to return to their villages during the economic crisis. The economic downturn fueled his desire to return to Ierapetra and maintain his familial and cultural legacy. One of the numerous priorities of their local community is the preservation of *georgalidiko alogo*, a horse that has lived on Crete for thousands of years. The next morning, we took a stroll with Alexis to view the monumental ancient olive tree of Kavousi. Although this viewpoint is contentious, many locals consider it to be the most ancient olive tree in the world. As we were circling the tree and admiring its natural splendor, Alexis insisted, "you absolutely must walk the Kavousi Minoan route while you are a resident here."

The following day, Alexis arranged for me to be picked up from Pahia Ammos, a village in Ierapetra, and taken to the Minoan route by one of his friends, Sotiris. Hiking the path instilled in me a profound appreciation for the

⁴ In this section, I only focused on one temporal orientation that is associated with energy transition in Western Macedonia: energy future as a perpetuation of an unjust past. However, further ethnographic inquiry in the region can uncover a wide range of distinct temporal structures and experiences. For instance, several anti-transition discourses in the region portray the transition as a violent rupture with a relatively peaceful past that was mostly characterized by the region's prosperity as the country's energy pillar. A speech delivered at a seminar held on December 14 organized by local officials from the energy municipality of Eordaia (Western Macedonia) offers a pertinent illustration of this temporal orientation. The title of the event was telling: "The future of energy in Western Macedonia." The purpose of the gathering was to debate the hasty decision to phase out lignite by 2028. In his speech, the mayor of the town, Plakentas Panagiotis, portrayed the energy transition as a "violent" process that demonizes the national fuel (lignite) and serves the interests of international natural gas conglomerates. In his portrayal of the upcoming future, Western Macedonia will be turned into an abandoned region, and its economy will be in ruins. Local ecosystems will be degraded since the hasty and premature closing of the mines will prevent the restoration of coal mining regions from being carried out as planned (Dimos Eordaia, 2020).

region's rich history and natural beauty. Sotiris, a middle-aged man who had previously practiced law and served as the community's president in Pahia Ammos, underlined the value of the area's history while giving me a ride with his pickup truck:

Although this should be done over all of Crete, we are documenting the perennial olive trees in our region. We are recording the olive trees, and we are creating six cultural paths that link the olive trees to other monuments. [...] This trail, which you will now stroll down, was originally used by postmen, who were transporting letters with their mules.

The fact that locals in Ierapetra like Alexis and Sotiris opposed industrial renewable energy projects was not irrelevant to their involvement with the aforementioned activities; these RES projects were portrayed as eroding the organic harmony and unity between nature, cultural heritage, and human beings. On these grounds, the transfer of four wind turbines for the erection of a wind farm at the archaeological site of the Isthmus of Ierapetra aroused controversy. Although the Local Council for Monuments in Crete declared that there is no visual contact between the four wind turbines and the ancient sites, the Citizens' Committee of Ierapetra claimed that the installation of wind turbines jeopardized the archaeological site. For its initiatives to preserve this archaeological site, the Committee was awarded the European Archaeological Heritage Prize in 2021. In a fiery press release, the Committee declared that this award was a triumph for all the collectives in the country that oppose industrial RES, and that their efforts had been vindicated on a worldwide level ("To the Citizens' Committee of Ierapetra the award", 2022):

With the announcement of the licensing of a wind farm installation in the sole archaeological site of the Isthmus of Ierapetra in the autumn of 2018, motivated and active residents formed the Citizens' Committee of Ierapetra to conserve our place's legacy. We perceive our history as an inseparable whole that encompasses monuments, perennial olive trees, the natural environment with its flora and fauna, and the products of our forefathers' relationship with nature. These three years of work were surprisingly rewarded when the European Association of Archaeologists (EAA) announced the awarding of the European Archaeological Heritage Prize for 2021 to our group. This is a crucial and international recognition that can only give us and all the collectives in the country strength in our fight against unlawful commercial interests that, in the name of profit, pass like steamrollers and taint forever our region's environment and heritage.

On one of my last days in Ierapetra, over lunch in his stone-built and traditional home, Alexis recounted eloquently how the Cretan traditional way of life (*lyra*, a Cretan traditional instrument, and *raki*, a local distilled alcoholic drink) inspired their opposition to renewables: "The anemological mast was once demolished. They had put up a mast with wind turbines, and those permits are still in place. People said they would pull it down, but not at night like they do everywhere in Crete; they would take it down during the day with *lyres* and *raki*. And yes, that is how it happened; there was a 500-person demonstration." Astonished by his

breathhtaking narration, I responded, "You describe it vividly. I wish I could have been there."

Conclusions and Discussion

By exploring two distinct temporal orientations that are prevalent among trade unions and citizens' initiatives that oppose energy transition, this paper sought to place time and temporality at the forefront of the social sciences and add to the body of knowledge in the field of energy futures. According to one temporal orientation investigated in Western Macedonia, namely that of a bleak energy future that is identical to a stifling past and present, the transition was portrayed as bolstering a long-running neoliberal experiment that is at odds with the interests of the working class and the local communities. Based on this first ethnographic section, I contend that the question at hand is whether the current transition leads to an energy future that is largely experienced as "a repetition, a preordered piece in a circle that is always the same" (Bloch, 1996, p. 143). This argument is in line with studies investigating energy transitions in various locations. For example, Franquesca (2019) has also claimed that for many Southern Catalans, "the arrival of wind energy was not lived as a rupture but as a continuation of old patterns" (p. 118). In a similar vein, Cymene Howe (2019), who has investigated the energy transition in Mexico, wonders whether "renewable energy is really anything "new" at all, especially when seen from the point of view of centuries of domination and militant responses to that domination" (p. 106). The ethnographic study by Spyridakis and Christodoulou (2019) that was carried out in Greece is another pertinent example of similar temporal orientations. Spyridakis and Christodoulou (2019) coined the term "temporality of precariousness" to analyze the life stories of unemployed informants who lived in precarious circumstances in Greece. Two distinct temporal orientations for jobless people were identified by Spyridakis and Christodoulou's (2019) analysis. The first, "I thought that things would always be the same," reflects experiences of being captured in vicious circles and past identities, while the second, "We go step by step," is more closely related to presentist mentalities and worries for the future (p. 68).

In the second ethnographic vignette, the paper interpreted the energy transition in Ierapetra as a sweeping social process that obliges citizens to forfeit their enduring ties to nature and cultural heritage. The argument proposed is that the installation of the four wind turbines was portrayed as a process that disrupts the continuity between the ancient past, the precarious present, and the uncertain future, uprooting locals' cultural roots and eroding their identity. The *georgalidiko alogo*, perennial olive trees, and archaeological remnants from the Neolithic, Minoan, Archaic, Classical, Roman, Byzantine, Venetian, and Ottoman periods— all cultural markers of local identity—were jeopardized by the onslaught of a relentless and profit-oriented socio-economic system. This "avalanche" of industrial renewables in the region brought to the surface the relevance of local history and spurred inhabitants to highlight intangible and

tangible cultural resources. The infestation of renewables imposed by economic interests beyond the local community impeded the envisioning of more just futures; in the midst of an energy transition portrayed as a rupture and as orchestrated by unlawful commercial interests, a long-forgotten past emerged as what Knight (2012) has described as culturally and temporally proximate.

Given that the thriving and flourishing of hypothetical future human and non-human beings, as well as the preservation of their ecosystems, are at the center of environmental policy-making and scientific pursuits and discourses, psychologists are now under pressure to develop conceptual breakthroughs, particularly when it comes to future orientations. Placing temporality at the center of the discipline could be a potential strategy for preventing psychological science from further depoliticizing climate change. Our critical engagement with how climate change temporalities are structured and organized can motivate us to voraciously seek utopian elements in our daily practices as practicing psychologists, mental health professionals, and critical social scientists. For instance, rather than relying on business as usual and framing eco-anxiety as a wholly psychological condition, researchers could investigate how the psychological concerns and complaints of young citizens about the climate hold the potential to propel us out to new societies and a reinvented field of psychology, where human-nature interrelations are positioned at the forefront of our approaches.

Critical environmental psychologists interested in temporal theorizing can draw from several critical psychological and social scientific approaches in order to overcome their problematic view of temporal experiences and, in particular, futural thought. The theoretical framework of *Kritische Psychologie* conceptualizes the "human way of life" as one that is marked by foresight (Räthzel & Uzzell, 2019, p. 1398). The approach attempts to address the transformative potentialities and the dual character (*doppelte Möglichkeit*) of human subjectivity by outlining how "humans can act within the social framework while at the same time, they are able to go beyond this framework and thereby modify it" (Dege, 2019, p. 117). Moreover, a collection of articles in the *Journal of Social and Political Psychology* has investigated the potential contribution of critical psychological knowledge in the field of prefigurative politics. The collection concerns social movements that prefigure radically alternative future societies (Cornish et al., 2016). Prefigurative movements embrace horizontal decision-making processes, imagine feasible futures in the present, and oppose neoliberal hegemony, the market economy, and representative democracy (Maeckelbergh, 2011). This means that engaging with the notion and practice of prefiguration can have profound epistemological implications for psychology. There are also some other future-oriented approaches in psychology, such as the model of prefigurative action research elaborated by critical community psychologists (Kagan & Burton, 2000) and the sophisticated method of Letters from the Future (Sools, 2020). These sporadic and scattered initiatives to explore the future orientations of the human agency may stimulate further inquiry, despite the fact that they do not constitute a comprehensive and well-established approach.

The anthropologist Hirokazu Miyazaki's (2004) study on hope may also serve as an impetus and inspiration. Miyazaki was one of the pioneers in introducing the approach of Ernst Bloch into the social sciences. He investigated how the Suvavou people's continuous attempts to reclaim their ancestral land have been repeatedly unsuccessful. Miyazaki's work has been ground-breaking as it portrays hope as a method, namely as a conceptual tool that reflects the indeterminate nature of the world and the open-ended process of producing anthropological knowledge (Miyazaki, 2004, p. 139). Investigating psychosocial phenomena through Miyazaki's critical lens has the potential to help us consider them as open-ended and transform the way we approach psychology theories and research methodologies.

Paulo Freire's conception of humanity as being in the process of becoming reflects this open-ended nature of social reality as well as the interplay between politics and temporality. In this light, his critique of social research is crucial for critical psychologists seeking to expose the depoliticization of climate change temporalities in mainstream psychology (Freire, 2005, p. 108):

The investigator who, in the name of scientific objectivity, transforms the organic into something inorganic, what is becoming into what is, life into death, is a person who fears change. He or she sees in change (which is not denied, but neither is it desired) not a sign of life, but a sign of death and decay. He or she does want to study change—but in order to stop it, not in order to stimulate or deepen it.

A critical engagement with time and temporality may offer us the opportunity to acquire insight into how social phenomena are in constant flux, how humanity is continuously evolving, and how the present "doesn't have to be like that" (Levitas, 2013, p. 48). Or, to put it another way, another world is possible.

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Beyond performance: Psychoanalysis and the politics of sport

Fabio Menezes dos Anjos & Ivan Ramos Estevão

Abstract

Sport is not only an enormous industry that moves billions yearly, but also an integral part of human lives and society, whether we are talking about professional sports or a recreational activity. Thus, it is an area with deep political implications. Some of these are highly visible for the public, and even grow to become important historical moments, such as John Carlos and Tommie Smith's Black Power salute at the 1968 Olympics, or Muhammad Ali's refusal to fight in the Vietnam War. Other aspects of the political nature of sports are subtle and deeply rooted in the very fabric of such practices, having a significant impact in social relations and matters such as gender, race, nationalism, among others. Fields such as anthropology, philosophy and sociology already engage in studies of sports and their political impact. However, psychology seems to take little interest in this aspect. Most of the studies in psychoanalysis focus on group relations with a particular interest in violence, such as hooliganism. Sport psychology, on the other hand, is primarily preoccupied with performance and adaptation, serving as means to obtain better competitive results or athlete mental wellbeing, but within the high performance sport logic. This article proposes to discuss how these approaches serve to maintain the *status quo* and ignore both the political impact of sport. We believe that shining a light on the political aspect and implications of sport is fundamental and can lead to deeper discussions not only in the field of sport, but also in the high-performance logic of society in general.

Keywords

Psychoanalysis, sport, Lacan, performance, athletes

Sport, in its different manifestations, is both a cultural phenomenon and an industry that moves billions annually, being an integral part of the lives of countless people, whether as an occupation, a recreational practice, or as a form of entertainment, since the main sporting events are seen by billions of people across the planet. Such a significant field, with so many effects and ramifications, evidently has relevant political implications which should be discussed. Areas of knowledge such as philosophy, sociology and anthropology have long dedicated themselves to discussing such issues. Psychology, however, seems to seldom show the same level of interest for sport in its political dimension.

Within psychology there is a field dedicated to sport, Sport Psychology, which has as its main focus the development of psychological skills and the treatment of issues related to competitive performance, although it is also dedicated to understanding the effects of sport on development, health and well-being (Weinberg & Gould, 2007; Samulski, 2009). The sport psychologist's work therefore can be applied not only to high-performance sports, but also to school or recreational sports, with a focus on prevention, health and rehabilitation. When working with elite athletes, however, interventions are mostly sought in order to generate an improvement in performance or to reduce symptoms that may affect performance and sports practice. Among such interventions, we can highlight techniques such as mental training, concentration training, biofeedback, and self-motivation, with the aim of improving activation, goal-setting, developing motivation, performance and willpower. The main objectives of psychological training in sport are "developing the psychic capacities of performance, creating a good emotional state during training and competitions and, finally, developing a good quality of life for athletes, coaches and other people involved in sport" (Samulski, 2009, p. 13). Since the focus of this article is not to discuss how sport psychology can intervene with athlete performance, we will not elaborate further on these techniques. What we observe, however, is that there is little space in this field for the analysis of sport as a sociocultural element or the political issues that surround it, especially considering the constant need for results that is prevalent in the logic of elite sports.

In Psychology as a broader field, on the other hand, we can easily find studies, analyses and reflections on various elements of culture, such as literature, cinema, or art, and on social topics such as racism and gender issues, for example, but it is rare to find works that focus on sport. This does not mean, evidently, that such works do not exist. There are authors within Sport Psychology who dedicate themselves to studying issues that transcend aspects of athlete performance, and also within psychology as a broader field we can find studies on topics of sport. For the most part, however, analyses within psychology deal with themes of the psychology of masses, with the theme of violence by football hooligans in particular being one of the most investigated (some examples are Luccas, 1998; Moraes & Moraes, 2012; Santos, 2010). There are few studies that address athletes in their subjectivity and even less on the dynamics of high-performance sport and its effects as a product and reproducer of the logic of capitalist production.

Within psychoanalysis, although they are also rare, we have observed the existence of a few publications on sport. In that regard, the number 101 edition of the *Cliniques Méditerranéennes* magazine, published in France in 2020, represents an important step towards expanding discussions in this field, with the edition having as its declared objective to not merely propagate knowledge about the ideology of sport or to condemn mass ideology, but to identify challenges of the sporting phenomenon from a psychoanalytical point of view, questioning the place that sport occupies in the subject's psychic economy based on psychoanalytical notions and concepts (Petit & Brohm, 2020). The authors also mention the disinterest by psychoanalysts in the sports phenomenon, "except in

an anecdotal or ephemeral way" (Petit & Brohm, 2020, p. 6). As we have stated, such disinterest could be expanded to most psychologists as well. Another relevant publication is the book *Psychanalyse, Sport et Science*, by Marie-Hélène Brousse, Françoise Labridy, André Terrisse and Marie-Jean Sauret, which also discusses elements of sport in society and its impact on subjectivity and on the social bond. Other studies and publications exist in the field (such as Bastidas, 2002; Campos, 2015; Anjos, 2022), but they are rare and discussions about sport in psychoanalytic circles and events are mostly non-existent.

In that context, this article aims to discuss sport in its political dimension, as well as the influence that sport and its discursiveness can have in the social bond. In addition, we intend to touch on the absence of a broader production in this field and what are its effects, and finally point out the importance of a political reading within Psychology to think about sport. Our position is that, by not taking into account the issues of sports in society and its effects, Sport Psychology demonstrates a veiled political dimension, and possibly without realizing it, in the sense that it supports a logic and a discourse that encourage high-performance and the overcoming of limits without question, offering its knowledge and techniques to precipitate such objectives. We defend that Psychology can contribute in other ways to the analysis of the sports field, and our choice is to bring psychoanalysis to the debate as a theoretical reference, starting from Sigmund Freud and Jacques Lacan.

The social place of sport throughout history

We begin our discussion with a brief contextualization of sports practice throughout history, until we reach its place today. As it is not the main focus of this article, the role of sport in different civilizations over time will not be deepened, but we consider its mention relevant to the discussion here. Our proposal at this time is to illustrate the historical process that involved sport over time and how the current model of sport and its social representation was built.

Sport emerged in the prehistoric period and its origin refers to survival, the worship of gods and the practice of rituals. Later, it was organized in Greece as one of the most important events of Ancient History (Rubio, 2001). The political component was already in place early on: the Olympic Games brought together athletes from different city-states, many of which were often at war, and Olympic laws were established to protect competitions from possible political interference. Additionally, athletes occupied a distinct place in society, since participation in the Games was only allowed for citizens, a condition that, at the time, did not include women and slaves, who did not even have the right to watch the competitions. In such a context, the Games represented an important uniting factor that helped create a Hellenic culture (Besnier, Brownell & Carter, 2018).

Later, Macedonian and Roman conquerors assimilated the Olympics into their cultures, as a way of demonstrating their power and also their admiration for Hellenism. During this period, sports were integrated into social, political and economic structures and one of their roles was to reinforce the legitimacy of

leaders and the state (Besnier et al., 2018), an aspect of sport that, in many ways, is still present today. In addition, physical activity was seen as something positive for both individuals and society, since the existence of a large number of citizens in good physical shape represented a greater reserve of soldiers to be used in the event of conflicts with other states.

Over time, different peoples and civilizations throughout history have had their own unique relationships with sport, although the political element was a constant. In the Maya and Aztec Civilizations, ball games were family events, but they also played a role in the establishment of governments at the time. The importance and representativeness of sport in such civilizations is significant:

Sport played a central role in the emergence of complex societies in North America and Mesoamerica, given that these societies all engaged in sport-related spectacles....the sports associated with these spaces demonstrate the same links among spectacle, athleticism, and political power. (Besnier et al, 2018, p. 22)

Over the centuries, there was a homogenization of the concept of sport, especially in the context of Imperialism, which led to the expansion of the main sports modalities that we know and follow today around the world, as well as the suppression of the sports previously practiced in the territories that were colonized. From the middle of the 19th century, sports practice came to be seen as a component of the education of young people from the European middle class, being considered a way to train men for capitalism, colonialism, and militarism (Besnier et al., 2018). The concept of sport that guided this process was developed from an incorporation of the ideal of the male body inspired by Ancient Greece to the emerging ideologies of nationalism. The export of European sports to their colonies had as one of its functions the transmission of the culture, values and ideology of the colonizers. The practice of sports was, then, seen as a way to educate and civilize the colonized “savages” and to demonstrate the behavioral and aesthetic dominance and superiority of the European people. In addition to being a way to propagate European ideals, the practice of sports was seen as a way to dissipate the aggressiveness and sexual energy of the people of the colonies (Besnier et al., 2018). As the colonial hegemony began to break down and colonies became independent, sports clubs continued with the same function within society, but started to serve the new elites. Despite the independence process of nations, tension remained between colonizing and colonized nations in sports, and competitions between them became sites of resistance and national and cultural appreciation, an aspect that remains until today (Coakley, 2015; Besnier et al., 2018). One of many examples of this is Senegal's victory over France in the opening match of the 2002 FIFA World Cup, which was considered an unexpected result by most analysts, and caused widespread celebrations in the streets of Dakar.

Historically, therefore, we observe that sport is closely related to politics, surpassing the place of competition, leisure or an element of health promotion, generally serving the interests of the ruling class. One of the ways by which this logic works is that most national governments finance teams and athletes and offer them training centers. On the other hand, they present these athletes,

especially the winners and most popular ones, as representatives of the nation. This is a way of seeking legitimacy and acceptance from the population, and “this is why so many political leaders present themselves as friends of sport, or even as faithful fans” (Coakley, 2015, p. 441). The emotional bond created by a sport or team can be established to reaffirm the identity that further connects people with the city or nation.

Today's main sports manifestation, the modern Olympic Games have emerged, similarly to the Ancient Games that served as its inspiration, with an organization that excluded several members of society. The first edition took place in 1896 in Athens and, in its origin, the games were restricted to amateur athletes, a definition that favored members of the elites, since it prevented the participation of athletes who used their skills to financially support themselves. Moreover, in the first edition of the games, only men could participate in the competitions. Over time, such restrictions were reviewed and abandoned, in what was a gradual and complex process, especially with regard to female participation. Pierre de Coubertin, founder of the modern Olympic Games, viewed men as the Olympic ideal and, for him, the role of women should be that of spectators of men's achievements. This changed from the following edition, but only in some modalities, such as golf, tennis, archery, and figure skating, as they were seen, at the time, as being more feminine, with an emphasis on coordination and body aesthetics based on grace and beauty. (Coakley, 2015). Over the decades, such restrictions have been reduced, but only in the 1964 Olympics there was a female insertion in a team sport, volleyball, and only in the London Games, in 2012, all sports began to be played by men and women.

Over its history, the modern Olympic Games were the scene of several moments and demonstrations with relevant political implications, such as Jesse Owens winning four gold medals in athletics at the Berlin Olympics in 1936, while Hitler sought to use the games to prove his theory of superiority of the Aryan race. At the time, the Nazi government had dedicated considerable resources to the training of German athletes and Owens' victories challenged the ideology of Aryan supremacy (Besnier et al., 2018). Another famous case was that of athletes Tommie Smith and John Carlos, who held a protest on the podium of the 1968 Olympic Games in Mexico City. After winning the gold and bronze medals in the 200 meters event, they went to the awards ceremony barefoot and raised a fist with a black glove during the execution of the national anthem, a salute associated with the American Black Power movement (Coakley, 2015). Both were expelled from the Olympic village and the American Olympic track and field team and, in addition, suffered death threats, before eventually being recognized by society after many years. In 2005, both were honored with a statue at the University of San José, California, where they had studied (Small, 2008).

Conflicts between nations have also had a political impact on sports. During the Cold War, the United States boycotted the Moscow Olympics, in 1980, and subsequently the Soviet Union boycotted the following games, which were held in Los Angeles in 1984. The Cold War as a whole was a period in which main nations involved in the conflict “used the Olympics and other international sport

competitions to make claims about the superiority of their political and economic systems and ideologies” (Coakley, 2015, p. 440). In this scenario, the use of doping was also constant.

There are also other instances where sporting events feature a prominent political component, such as the aforementioned cases where there is a colonialist history between the nations competing, as is the case of cricket matches between England and its former colonies, or the previously mentioned match between France and Senegal at the World Cup. Another case is that of competitions played between countries in a state of tension with each other, as was the case of the soccer match between Iran and the United States in the 1998 World Cup and the hockey match between the United States and the Soviet Union, at the 1980 Winter Olympics. There is also the case of matches between teams whose origins refer to religions that are in conflict, such as Rangers and Celtic, from Scotland, one of the greatest rivalries in the world of football, in which the teams have Protestant and Catholic origins, respectively. These situations can bring additional tensions both to the public and to the athletes themselves, since there is often an added expectation and pressure to perform and defeat the rival team.

Sport today: culture, justice and meritocracy

Financial investments in the sports environment are increasingly high, with one main objective being the expansion to new and larger markets, especially by the corporations involved with it. Sport has never been as commercialized as it is today, with stadiums, teams and events bearing the names of corporations and being associated with corporate logos. The biggest sporting events in the world, such as the World Cup and the Olympic Games, are watched by billions of people around the world and are spectacles that move a significant amount of financial investment (Campos, 2015; Coakley, 2015). What has been observed in the past decades is a “redimensioning of the importance of the sporting phenomenon by modern society, having the media as its main promoter and ally, which has globalized sport” (Rubio, 2001, p. 101).

Nowadays, sport cannot be thought of as a mere recreational practice or form of entertainment without taking into account its place in capitalist society as a significant part of the global economy. One of the main changes that can be noticed in this new era is a shift in the sporting imagery, as sport “has largely disconnected itself from its popular connotations and has appropriated itself of personal fulfillment through consumption” (Ehrenberg, 2010, p. 14). This is largely due to the way in which sport and athletes are inserted in and perceived by modern society.

Sport is so anchored in everyday life that it is not just a form of leisure or a specific bodily activity designed and organized in terms of performances to be achieved, but the manifestation of a generalized relationship with existence. . . . Sport has left the stadiums and gymnasiums; it has abandoned the restricted context of sporting practices and spectacles: it is a system of conduct in itself that

consists of implicating the individual in the formation of his autonomy and responsibility. (Ehrenberg, 2010, p. 18)

Sport nowadays occupies, therefore, a social place that transcends that of an occupation for athletes or a mode of entertainment for fans. It represents a set of values, a way of life that should be appropriated by everyone, whether they are athletes or not. The spectacularization given by the media contributes to this scenario by reproducing such logic. The role of sport in such an appropriation can be explained by the social view of the sporting practice, especially in terms of elite sports: “sport, as a sign of contemporary society, refers to the image of living well, being well with oneself, being victorious” (Rubio, 2001, p. 103). These ideals are in line with those of capitalist society, but such a perception ignores the discontents in sport, such as personal struggles and mental health issues that athletes face, and which have only recently started becoming more public. What happens instead is the transmission of an idealized and romanticized version of the life and career of an athlete, in a way that is meant to be used as an example of the standards that society expects from individuals.

The reality of sports presents a very different scenario in several aspects. Firstly, an important distinction must be made between regular physical activity and high-performance sports when discussing health and well-being. Although they are socially seen as examples of peak physical and aesthetic fitness, many elite athletes are far from a healthy body, since the training they undergo has negative effects on the body (Besnier et al., 2018). Professional sports aim to show which athletes are the strongest, most prepared and skillful and insert them into training programs that generate discomfort, pain and potentially even injuries in the name of overcoming limits. This element is present in the Olympic motto itself: *citius, altius, fortius*, which can be translated from Latin as “faster, higher, stronger”.

Influenced by social and cultural transformations, sport absorbed characteristics of modern industrial society, which contributed to making performance one of its guiding principles (Rubio, 2001; Quintilio, 2016). Sport is part of capitalist society and reproduces its discursiveness, especially in its professional modality, placing high performance, victory and resilience in the face of obstacles as the main objectives of individuals. Thus, the values that dictate contemporary sport are aligned with those of capitalist society, which also values winners, the best, the strongest and the most skilled. These are used as an example for the “losers” and contribute to the perpetuation of certain types of conduct. The term *loser* itself is seen as a highly depreciative term in society, and one that is used in the various contexts, many of them unrelated to sports (Rubio, 2001). In this context, elite sport leaves little room for playful practice, imposing the speed of a medium where the constant production of results is imperative (Campos, 2015). At the same time, “most people associate sports with play, and they see athletes as having fun rather than working” (Coakley, 2015, p. 377). Many athletes, however, have stated that they do not enjoy their sport, or even outright hate it, such as tennis legend Andre Agassi (Agassi, 2010). Others mention missing a time in their lives where they just played for fun, without the

pressures of professional sport, often referring to childhood, such as Uruguayan footballer Edinson Cavani (Cavani, 2018).

Another aspect that is important to consider is the possibility of inclusion for potential participants. Many sports are considerably exclusive, both with regard to physical conditions for practice and in relation to financial conditions for insertion and maintenance. Currently, in most sports, “playing, watching and achieving excellence in sports depends on resources provided by individuals, families, governments or corporations” (Coakley, 2015, p. 266). This means that opportunities for sports participation are closely linked to social aspects. Even so, the dominant discursiveness in sport states that it is an environment that offers equal opportunities for all and “inequalities related to money, position, and influence have no effect” (Coakley, 2015, p. 267).

Furthermore, a highly present aspect in the discourse of elite sports that can be questioned is related to the notion of justice. Ehrenberg (2010) defines sports competition as the application of identical confrontation rules to everyone “in a stable environment and without temporal unforeseen events” (p. 42). Such a form of competition socially occupies the place of an ideal of meritocratic justice, although it has always been marked by what Ehrenberg defines as *fair inequality*. In this perspective, we argue that sport does not necessarily deal with an absolute concept of justice, but seeks, with its rules, the creation of equal conditions for discovering the best, the most apt or the most prepared *at that moment*. As a whole, competitive sports are organized in ways that inspire stories and narratives that reaffirm dominant ideologies. One of the main discourses that dominate this environment is that “people can achieve anything through hard work and discipline, and that failure is the result of laziness and poor choices” (Coakley, 2015, p. 17). This notion is closely related to such an ideal of meritocratic justice that is customarily attributed to sports competitions. In this context, winning athletes and coaches are seen as models of success, occupying an idealized place in society. Sports competitions and their results are used as evidence that “inequalities are based on merit, that competition identifies winners, and that losers should work harder or change themselves if they want to be winners, or simply get up and try again” (Coakley, 2015, p. 271).

There are, however, other points that are imposed in a sporting competition and that allow us to question the character of justice that is present in the traditional sports discourse. In addition to the physical and technical conditions of the individual athlete, there are great differences between the economic power of different teams, federations and even countries, which means that some athletes have significantly better conditions to train and develop their skills, which tends to translate into better results. Although this is not a guarantee or the only decisive factor, an analysis of the Olympic medal table shows that it generally reproduces the order of the main political and economic powers (Rubio, 2001). In national championships of different modalities, it is also observed that most titles are won by teams that have more economic power and training centers with better structure.

In a culture that values spectacle and heroism, elite sports are an ideal avenue for the manifestation of both, being seen as a technique for producing

autonomy. In this social place occupied by sport, some athletes become celebrities and the narratives of the specialized media reinforce this condition, emphasizing the heroic aspect of the practice (Coakley, 2015). Although the sociopolitical framework that predominates in sport brings into play elements that increase the drama and appeal to the public, a fundamental part of the sport's attractiveness is ultimately related to the individual who is at the center of the sporting scene: the athlete. A mass phenomenon like sport needs "heroes", "stars" or "idols" to maintain its appeal, as it is the existence of such figures that allows people to identify with the event (Helal, 1998). Organizers, sponsors and the media, viewing sport as a consumer product to be sold, need to "create protagonists to sell an expected and desired spectacle" (Rubio, 2001, p. 103). This makes it in the best interest of the media, managers and promoters to develop narratives in order to generate appeal and identification to competitors or teams. One of the main ways by which this happens is through the construction of stories featuring themes such as a redemption arc or the creation of a duality between athletes or teams, placing heroes and villains in the sports scene, creating rivalries. Everything is organized and presented with the aim of entertaining audiences and keeping sponsors happy (Coakley, 2015). The athlete, in this situation, may become identified by the public with a persona which he does not necessarily feel comfortable with, and which may have negative consequences, such as abuse on social media.

The media coverage is focused on the main athletes of the most popular sports, a segment of the athlete population that does not represent the reality experienced by the vast majority of sportspeople. A consequence of this type of approach to the sporting phenomenon is that it leads to a distorted and romanticized view of sport and the lives of athletes. Little space and attention are given to cases found more commonly among athletes – that is, "those who play for one or two seasons before being cut or forced to quit for other reasons, especially injuries" (Coakley, 2015, p. 288). It is common that, in team sports, players sign an initial short-term contract which is then not renewed or even terminated before it is completed: "Much more typical than 30-year-old players contemplating another season are 24-year-olds facing the end of their professional sport careers" (Coakley, 2015, p. 288). Even in cases where athletes succeed, professional sport opportunities are short-term, averaging three to seven years in team sports and three to twelve years in individual sports (Coakley, 2015). Although there is some variation in the duration of the career depending on the sport and the unique conditions of each athlete, it is a brief career, when compared to other areas of work. At the same time, involvement with sport demands full-time dedication, making it difficult to acquire resources such as other academic and professional training, which could facilitate the transition to another occupation after retirement from sport. This contributes to generating a unique mark in the athletes' relationship with their occupation.

The place that elite sports occupy in society and the narratives that are created within that world make it a profitable environment for companies to explore the advertising potential of athletes and competitions. In virtually every advertising campaign by manufacturers of sporting goods, not to mention many

campaigns by companies from other sectors, the image of one or several of the world's leading athletes is often used, followed by a slogan involving some form of imperative, whether in pursuit of glory in sport ("Write the future"), the aesthetic beauty of the game ("Joga bonito", or "Play beautiful") or simply taking action ("Just do it"). Among such advertising campaigns, one that is particularly relevant to our discussion due to its discursive elements is "Impossible is Nothing", by Adidas, released in 2004. This slogan seems to fit the elite sport discourse and reproduce it in an extreme manner, through the notion that every obstacle is merely something to be overcome, and such success is attainable through one's strength and determination. As previously mentioned, the discursiveness and narratives that are formed in sport place the resilience in the face of obstacles as an imperative and high-performance as a continuous goal. Physical pain, limitations and other difficulties, in this logic, occupy the place of obstacles to be overcome. This creates the notion that, in a competition, the winner is the one who was great enough to overcome them and the losers as those who did not have enough dedication, but who can do it if they try harder (Coakley, 2015). The narratives in the media, which portray the main athletes as superhumans and as mythical heroes, contribute to this illusory relationship with impossibility. In this environment where performance reigns supreme and the image of success obtained through a sum of talent and effort is elevated to the level of a goal and of the greater glory for human beings, a discourse is formed that seems to have no holes.

Psychoanalysis and sports politics

Up to this point, we have sought to present some of the political issues surrounding sport, in addition to the dominant discourse in such an environment and some of its effects. We consider this trajectory to be important for the discussion that will follow, about the role of psychology and psychoanalysis in this field. As we pointed out at the beginning of this article, we defend that, by not questioning the political dimension that is inherent to sport, not only sport psychology but the whole field of psychology ends up enabling and favoring the continuity of this whole a series of forms of relationship with the body, with competitiveness, with performance, with the notion of impossibility, among many others, that have effects both on the individuals involved with the sport and on the social bond as a whole.

Nowadays, we are aware, thanks to the numerous cases of athletes that have been publicly manifesting themselves, that this mode of production is increasingly beginning to show signs of its impact on the mental wellbeing of athletes. In recent years, athletes from the various disciplines, levels of competition and experience have spoken about their struggles. The height of such visibility so far was perhaps attained with the case of Simone Biles, at the 2020 Tokyo Olympics (which took place in 2021), when the American gymnast decided to withdraw from the individual all-around competition as well as the women's team competition, with an official statement by the USA gymnastics

mentioning that her decision was in order to focus on her mental health. Biles herself was open about the decision, stating that "*the mental was not there*", and that her goal was to focus on her wellbeing, because "there is more to life than gymnastics" (Ingle, 2021). Her decision was met with widespread support by her teammates, her coaching staff and many fellow athletes that spoke out about her decision and their own struggles with mental health. Even so, there is a part of the public and the media that does not take such demonstrations seriously. In addition, for all the manifestations of support that Biles received, the practical result was that she was replaced by another athlete who started to receive the attention of the public and sponsors and, consequently, the pressure for results. Biles and her decision, on the other hand, started to get less mentions and the discussion as a whole was cast aside, as the focus shifted to the rest of the games. This example demonstrates how the sporting environment, therefore, continues in the same way, only replacing the workforce that will perform in competition.

Faced with such logic, we propose a discussion of the theme using the theoretical framework of psychoanalysis. The interest of psychoanalysis in themes of society and culture dates back to the times of Freud. In his work, the father of psychoanalysis wrote numerous texts analyzing, questioning and developing relevant topics of his time, and his contributions maintain their relevance and power even today. Texts such as *Psychology of the Masses and Analysis of the Self*, from 1921, *Civilization and Its Discontents*, from 1930, among others, are texts that address the social bond, and demonstrate all of Freud's interest in the subjectivity of his time. Jacques Lacan, a French psychoanalyst, was also interested in themes that went beyond the clinic, also dealing with the political dimension of psychoanalysis. One of the main contributions to thinking about politics was his theory of four discourses, which offers possibilities for reading the forms of social ties and the modalities of *jouissance* present in society. For this discussion, Lacan's *discourse of the master* is especially relevant, since it is one of the main forms of subjection in society, for the master "gives a sign, and everybody runs" (Lacan, 1969-70/1992, p. 185). Lacan also makes an association between work and the discourse of the master and, moreover, of work as a proof of the discourse of the master's efficiency:

How is it that this discourse, that one hears so wonderfully well, can have maintained its denomination? This is proven by the fact that, explored or not, workers work.

Never before has worked been so honored, since humanity exists. And furthermore, it is out of the question that one does not work.

This is a success, then, of what I call the discourse of the master. (Lacan, 1969-70/1992, p. 178).

Lacan's theory, therefore, enables us to better understand forms of domination and submission in society. Beyond the discourses, psychoanalysis gives us an important theoretical background to think about society, politics and culture.

their [Freud and Lacan's] combined effort in psychoanalysis, managed to build formidable tools to thought itself and also, to the critical analysis of social

transformations. To a certain extent both thinkers dealt with the political scenario of their historical realities in their theoretical developments and both provided insights to the external political situations. (Gonsalves & Estevão, 2018, p. 170)

Bearing such developments in mind, we argue that sport is a phenomenon that, due to its relevance to the current culture around the world, in addition to the significant portion of the global economy that it moves, can and should be the object of study and analysis by psychoanalysts. This position is corroborated by Petit and Brohm (2020, p. 6), who, expanding this discussion, also address how sport penetrates social and even political discussions:

It is therefore in more ways than one that this phenomenon concerns psychoanalysis. Firstly, because sport can be understood as a cultural object, and we remember Sigmund Freud's interest in culture, a source of inspiration for his clinical and metapsychological reflections. No one can escape the realization that competitive sport rhythms the public life and becomes a priority subject for a large mass of citizens. This can be seen in the general saturation in the media and in political debates where it even becomes a campaign topic, even a 'communication' ground for propagandist slogans, such as 'the France that wins', for example. Sport becomes, moreover, a matter of educational policy and even of public health.

The authors also propose a critique of the naive belief in Olympic sports ideals, and the possibility of psychoanalysis and Freudian theories being used as keys to an understanding of elite sports beyond such illusions. Such arguments converge with the point we defend in this article, namely, that sport cannot be thought of in terms of isolated and self-contained practices and competitions, but inserted in a society with a dominant production logic, values and discourses. Moreover, sport is a medium in which such logics, values and discourses are not only reproduced, but strengthened, insofar as sport is a practice of discourse that

produces a vocabulary, a syntax and a rhetoric and induces a modern and secularized conception of the body, of achievements, of the so-called 'self-realization', which enriches the ideological apparatus of the State of democratic market societies, from the hygienist shift in turn of the 19th and 20th centuries until the dreams of augmented bodies of transhumanism. (Rassial & Salvadere, 2020, p. 39).

Since Freud, psychoanalysts have been concerned, among other things, with the investigation of political discourses and daily life in our culture, seeking to analyze the modalities of social bonding, as well as the political dimension of *jouissance*. Part of the objective of such analysts, in the neoliberal context, is to relocate politics and ethics as inseparable elements, pointing to a politics of resistance to the social instrumentalization of *jouissance* (Rosa et al, 2006). In this sense, understanding the dominant discursivities in the social bond is fundamental, since "discourse is the way in which language rigs *jouissance*, placing it in discursive forms that mark places, positions and functions" (Estevão & Prudente, 2019, p. 124). Currently, we observe, in addition to the discourse of

high-performance through sport, the proliferation of discourses of self-help, motivation and obedience,

deeply associated with aesthetic/moral categories such as willpower, beauty, resilience, good character and physical shape and health. On the other hand, for those who contradict these categories are reserved guilt, laziness, weakness of character, lack of willpower, ugliness, and poor health. (Estevão & Prudente, 2019, p. 132).

Such discursivity is articulated and even confused with the one we observe in elite sports, which is evidently not restricted to the field of sports competitions, penetrating the social bond as a whole (Ehrenberg, 2010). In such a logic, success, autonomy and self-realization become guiding principles, discursively organizing the imaginary of spectacle. This imaginary demarcates identifying positions, two of the main ones being the aforementioned *winners* and *losers*, typically associated with the logic of sports and, just like in sports, they are potentially reversible positions, since, in sports, you are only as good as your last game (Coakley, 2015). Moreover, such discourse names the ways through which individuals can rise above their challenges and become *winners*, placing success as something that is always within reach, if one is determined and works hard enough. Furthermore, success, autonomy and visibility are presented in our society as superegoic imperatives that demand more, whether in sports competitions, in corporate life, in relationships, in our relations with our bodies, and so on.

The imaginary apparatus that provides the mirror images for this is omnipresent in our culture. We refer to the formatting of bodies elected as imagery models such as, for example, the thin body, or the muscular one. There is also the model for proactive, enterprising, aggressive, focused and ambitious behavior directed at winning, so common in corporate language. (Estevão & Prudente, 2019, p. 131)

In such a social context, psychoanalysis emerges as a possibility to question such logics, since, with its ethics, it allows us to position ourselves in the face of such demands for adaptations to reality, which are, in turn, adaptations to discursive demands. Furthermore, the ethics of psychoanalysis imply a discourse, the psychoanalyst's discourse, as developed by Lacan. In his articulations about the four discourses, Jacques Lacan points to psychoanalysis as the opposite of the master's discourse (Lacan, 1969-70/1992). In this sense, psychoanalysis presents itself as a possibility for the subversion of discourses that promise and offer happiness and plenitude through high-performance and success. This does not mean that athletes should necessarily stop competing, but that they should have access to spaces and other forms of discourse that enable them to question aspects of their practice, and allow them to be guided in their practice by desire, interest and personal enjoyment.

In its subversive vocation, psychoanalysis continues to walk on along with humanity, and there is no way to disregard the reflections on the possibilities and

impossibilities that it lays bare, calling us to go further, to advance, influencing and being influenced. (Barbieri, 2017, p. 89)

With its ethics, psychoanalysis allows us to "sustain – and support – that the truth can never be completely told and that, therefore, there are always gaps in knowledge" (Alberti, 2008, p. 10). Here lies a possibility for subverting the politics and discourses of high-performance. Alberti also points out the importance of giving up the requirement of what *should* be different, which would fall on the side of censorship and moralism, to the detriment of one that *could* be different. Sports practice *could* be different. The way we approach competition, high-performance, winning, and losing in society *could* be different. Thus, psychoanalysis, with its ethics and politics, allows us to go beyond an analysis of sport as a pre-defined and immutable phenomenon. It allows us to observe the effects of sports discourse on those who engage in such an environment, beyond demands for adaptation, pointing to the subject of the unconscious.

Before inquiring and intervening on possible sports performance problems, we advocate listening to athletes beyond their performance and competitive demands. We do not believe that, with this, questions will arise that will generate ruptures in the logic of professional sport and major changes, since they are rooted very deeply in the social fabric. Nonetheless, pointing out holes in the high-performance discourse can already have significant effects, especially for athletes, who can, in this way, rethink the places and positions that they occupy and how they want to deal with this. Because they are individuals who often have great social visibility, such effects can reach a greater audience, and could have an influence on future generations, how they deal with pressures to perform and their mental well-being. It is evidently not possible to know what the effects of further questioning of the logic and politics of sport by psychology and, above all, psychoanalysis, will be. Even so, this seems to us to be a debate that deserves to be deepened.

Final considerations

Throughout this article, we sought to bring several dimensions of the relationship between sport and politics, in order to discuss the position that psychology and especially psychoanalysis has historically adopted when dealing with this field. We consider it important to mention that this is not a matter of merely criticizing sport psychology or the logic of high-performance sport, but of pointing out that there are other possibilities for addressing the various issues that sport raises. Within the current production logic in our society, sport psychology has its function and fulfills it well. Evidently, federations, clubs and athletes are interested in increased performance, which in turn will mean better results and, consequently, an increase in income and greater visibility for their brands. Furthermore, it seems unfair to us to make a general statement that sport psychologists are disinterested in issues other than performance. What we

propose here is the possibility for other members of the field of psychology to get involved with sport, as they will be able to insert themselves in the scene from another place, without a commitment to performance. In this sense, it is possible to think of different fields of action, such as clinical work, social work, in addition, of course, politics. In this context, psychoanalysis presents itself as a very interesting alternative, since its discourse has subversive potential, going against adaptive demands and betting on the subject of the unconscious. Therefore, it is fundamental that psychoanalysts insert themselves further into the debate about sports and high-performance.

Finally, we would like to point out that there are numerous topics within the field of elite sports that can and should be studied and discussed by both psychologists and psychoanalysts. We could mention childhood sports to retirement, gender issues, the stigma surrounding mental health, just to name a few topics that are worthy of a deeper look. The high-performance discourse and its impact on the social bond is also a relevant theme that could bring interesting findings. In all of these, opening a dialogue with other sport sciences, such as psychology, sociology and anthropology can also enhance the discussions and analyses. We humbly hope that this article can offer some contributions to this scenario.

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Transforming neoliberal social psychology into an emancipatory science: *A call to abolish the police*¹

Anup Gampa & Jeremy Sawyer

Abstract

Social psychology's response to continued police brutality against Black people and their communities has been to work with police departments to implement interventions and trainings. We first discuss neoliberalism and then show how mainstream social psychology's various forms of interventions underscore it as a neoliberal practice, thus limiting its capacity to fight police violence. Social psychology should, instead, become an emancipatory science by incorporating structural-level and historical analyses in addition to individual- and cultural-level analyses. For us, an emancipatory psychology is an intersectional Marxist psychology and involves the following elements: (1) investigating police brutality from a structural and historical perspective, which most clearly shows that the police are a tool of repression that needs to be abolished; (2) this means being in solidarity with social movements such as Black Lives Matter, and requires radical solutions, i.e., anti-capitalist, against police brutality and racism; (3) the oppressed are seen as the principle agents of change whose experiences and analyses become primary drivers of social psychological research; and finally, (4) following from the prior elements, all resources are democratically controlled and allocated in a manner that respects the movement's call to defund and abolish the police. Armed with that understanding, we critique major social psychological interventions at different levels: implicit bias and procedural justice trainings such as the Behavioral Insight Model targeting situational-level changes, and community policing targeting institutional-level changes. We also discuss the strengths and limitations of cultural psychology's approach to fighting racism. We end with examples of research (studies connecting social movements to aggregate changes in implicit attitudes) and methodologies (critical participatory action research) that incorporate analysis from the levels of the situation to that of the structure, and thus align with an emancipatory psychology.

Keywords

abolition, implicit attitudes, intersectional, Marxist psychology, neoliberalism, police, reform, social psychology

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Put simply, capitalism requires inequality and racism enshrines it.

Ruth Wilson Gilmore²

Some reforms end up reproducing the system in another form...you put out some kind of a reform, and then that reform becomes institutionalized. Worse than institutionalization, the reform actually creates a new form of consciousness and a new form of “common sense”. That reform itself becomes the new common sense, and that’s so dangerous on so many levels.

We cannot reform police. We cannot reform prisons. We cannot.

Mariame Kaba³

George Floyd was murdered on May 25th, 2020, by a Minneapolis police officer who pressed his knee onto Mr. Floyd’s neck for nine minutes and 29 seconds. David McAtee was killed by the Louisville police on May 31st, 2020, while he was protesting the murder of George Floyd. Another Louisville resident, Breonna Taylor, was fatally shot in her apartment by her city’s police department on May 13th, 2020. The catalogue of police violence will be longer if we include incidents such as the arrest of six-year-old Kaia Rolle, who suffers from pediatric obstructive sleep apnea and thus could be prone to tantrums, for accidentally kicking her teacher. It is a list that ranges from being arrested while waiting for a friend at a local Starbucks to being confronted by the police for playing golf “too slowly”. A list that includes the police killings of Eric Garner, Michael Brown, Tamir Rice, Sandra Bland, and Mya Hall. A list, one that is ever increasing, indicative of a deeply rooted racism within U.S. society and its institutions on all levels—exemplified here by its police departments. These latest atrocities against Black people have resulted in nationwide protests, strikes, and walkouts not just for police reforms, but with the loudest demands being made for the outright defunding and abolishment of the police.

What role should social psychology play in fighting police brutality—a particularly pernicious component of racism? Presently, many social psychologists are actively working *in partnerships with* police officers and departments (Jasperse & Stillerman, 2021). On one side of the spectrum, this takes the form of marshalling evidence *against* racial bias in police shootings (e.g., Cesario, 2021; Johnson et al., 2019 - retracted). In the more liberal mainstream of social psychology, these partnerships with police advocate for reforms meant to address the racism in policing (Fridell, 2008; Goff, 2017; Luscombe, 2020; Russell-Brown, 2018; President’s Task Force, 2015). We pose the question, are these alliances between social psychologists and police adequate means to eliminate pervasive brutality and racism within the institution of

² Gilmore, R. W. (2015). The Worrying State of the Anti-Prison Movement. *Social Justice: A Journal of Crime, Conflict & World Order*. Retrieved from <http://www.socialjusticejournal.org/the-worrying-state-of-the-anti-prison-movement/>

³ Kaba, M. (2021). *We do this 'til we free us: Abolitionist organizing and transforming justice*. Haymarket Books.

policing, or can we take a more effective emancipatory approach? Our stance is that social psychology has to incorporate structural and historical analyses (i.e., historical-materialism) to understand racism more fully, and it necessarily has to transform itself into an emancipatory science in order to help liberate us from racism. We expand on both these points below, but suffice it to say, “an emancipatory psychological science”, as Ratner (2015) succinctly states, is one that “empowers people to evaluate society and change it”.

What follows, then, is a call to transform current social psychology into a field that actively amplifies the ever-increasing efforts across the globe to reform and revolutionize society (Youngs, 2017). In order to illustrate the reasoning and methodology behind our call, and to address a most pressing issue of our times, i.e., racialized state violence, we will examine social psychology’s interventions (such as implicit bias and procedural justice trainings) in police departments from the perspective of intersectional Marxist social psychology (Gampa & Sawyer, 2021). We list here the elements, adapted from Le Blanc (2016), of such a perspective as it applies to racism and policing, and expand upon them in the rest of the document. The first element is seeing policing as a tool of repression. This can only be done if both the individual police and the individual’s social context are studied from a structural and historical perspective—i.e., analysis extending beyond the immediate situation. Second, it involves a radical anti-capitalist commitment when considering solutions against police brutality and racism. Third, it centers the oppressed and exploited as agents of change. Finally, it demands democratic control of resources such that “the free development of each will be the condition for the free development of all” (Marx & Engels, 1888). Using these elements, we will illustrate how a structural and historical analysis of policing inevitably leads to questioning social psychology’s current practice of addressing police brutality by supporting police reform at the individual or even institutional level. Part of this analysis is to connect social psychology to neoliberalism, which then allows us to implicate capitalism in the persistence of police brutality. This further underscores our call for solidarity with grassroots social movements such as Black Lives Matter (BLM). In other words, we present an intersectional Marxist psychology (IMP)⁴ argument to abolish the police.

We take a small digression here to note that we recognize the heterogeneity of actions, policies, philosophies, locations, and peoples involved in anti-racism work in general, and BLM in particular. As such, we do not claim to be speaking on behalf of any particular group. The range of conversations within the current Movement for Black Lives includes the full spectrum from defending the status quo to revolutionary. Social psychology, however, engages mostly with reformist perspectives, or even with reactionary perspectives (e.g., Cesario, 2021), but never with abolition perspectives (see Table 1).

⁴ The terms “intersectional” and “Marxist”, just like the word “cultural”, also imply “social”, making it redundant. Also, IMP is more fun than IMSP.

Table 1. The number of times the following terms appear within social psychology conference programs: police (or policing)/reform*/defund/abolish.

	Professional Organization							
	<i>Society for the Psychological Study of Social Issues (SPSSI)</i>				<i>Society for Personality and Social Psychology (SPSP)</i>			
Year	Police/ing	Reform	Defund	Abolish	Police/ing	Reform	Defund	Abolish
2013					10	1	0	0
2014					13	4	0	0
2015					38	1	0	0
2016	65	13	0	0	28	1	0	0
2017	42	8	0	0	41	0	0	0
2018	53	5	0	0	20	5	0	0
2019	82	19	0	0	34	1	0	0
2020		No conference.			34	5	0	0
2021	111	25	2	2**	22	2	0	0

Note: SPSSI did not publish full conference programs for years 2013 to 2015.

*reform: could be for anything, not just for policing; doesn't reflect reforms-based research that doesn't use the word reform, for example use of cameras. ** not an explicit call to abolish

Similarly, as shown in Table 2, capitalism, perhaps the single greatest *global* structure dictating our lives, also seldom appears in psychology literature. As we show, the absence of these two topics within social psychology is not accidental. We endeavor to rectify this omission.

Table 2. Number of Articles in Major Social Psychology Journals Whose Text Mention the Word Capitalist/Capitalism/Capitalistic, 2007 to 2022

Journal	# of Articles
Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin	1
Personality and Social Psychology Review	0
Journal of Personality and Social Psychology	1
Journal of Economic Psychology	1
Journal of Social Issues	2
Social Issues and Policy Review	1
Social Psychological and Personality Science	0
Political Psychology	2
Journal of Social and Political Psychology	2
American Psychologist	1

Journal of Consumer Psychology	0
Journal of Cross-Cultural Psychology	3
Psychological Bulletin	0
Psychological Inquiry	1
Psychological Review	0
Nature Human Behavior	0
Proceedings of the National Academy of the Sciences	1
Analyses of Social Issues and Public Policy	3
Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin	1
Total	19

Note. Searched via APA's PsycInfo database. This table is inspired by Table 1 in Kasser et al. (2007) which showed that these terms appeared 14 times between 1887-2006, though not in the very same journals.

Social Psychology and Neoliberalism

First, by *social psychology*, we mean *a field whose subject matter is individual-level social cognition* and is almost exclusively grounded in individualistic ontology and positivist epistemology (Arfken, 2015; Dienes, 2008; Flyvbjerg, 2014). This field, housed in psychological social psychology and experimental social psychology (compared to social psychology housed in sociology departments or the psychosocial persuasion within psychoanalysis), is “the dominant or mainstream approach” of studying the individual in the context of a social situation (McDonald et al., 2017, p.364). The space carved out by social psychology is the interaction between the individual and the situation, *where the situation is defined narrowly* to include only the immediate situation, but not necessarily the cultures or institutions, and much less the histories and structures, that make the situation possible (Trawalter et al., 2020). Such a narrow conception of social forces was not always the case in social psychology (Fine, 2012; Gergen, 1973; Lewin, 1939), and those who use a broader conception usually fall under the banner of *critical social psychology* (Reicher, 1997).

Second, we consider the *current mainstream form of social psychology as neoliberal social psychology* (NSP; Adams et al., 2019; Arfken, 2015; Arfken, 2018; Ratner, 2015). For Fine (2012), neoliberalism through social psychology is the reorientation of social psychology away from “macrointerests and shared fates”, thus, an urging to “look away from the 1%” and ignoring the privatization of public life. This turning away from structural politics has been made the “global standard through processes of intellectual and cultural imperialism” (Adams et al., 2019), resulting in social psychology's empirical obsession with

“the individual who is ‘damaged,’ ‘at risk,’ or a ‘potential terror’” (Fine, 2012, p.422). Social psychology, then, not only is shaped in the image of neoliberalism, but furthers neoliberalism in and of itself (Ratner, 2015).

Neoliberal thought is a utopian ideology built on libertarian values in which each entity in society (whether it is an individual or an organization) is treated as an entrepreneurial unit, wherein the success and failure of that unit ought to be attributed to its own efforts and merits, or lack thereof (Foucault et al., 2008; Harvey, 2007). During the postwar era, the growing grassroots movements—labor, civil-rights, and anti-war—in addition to decades of Keynesian economics that promoted a welfare state, had eroded power amongst the economic and political elites (Harvey, 2007). This was tolerable to the ruling classes as long as the economy continued to expand during the postwar boom. The global economic crisis of the 1970s and 1980s, however, resulted in an overall policy shift to neoliberalism, a response by the financial and political elite to reign in the power of labor and to roll back the gains of the civil rights’ and women’s movements in order to restore the elite class’ dominance (Harvey, 2016). Thus, neoliberalism emphasizes individual outcomes as the result of personal responsibility and choice, while purposefully obfuscating and/or minimizing any structural underpinnings of behavior. Neoliberal logic discourages social- or societal-level analysis of behavior and discounts social responsibility for individual outcomes (Ratner, 2015). Simply put, neoliberalization is an “articulation of state, market and citizenship that harnesses the first to impose the stamp of the second onto the third” (Wacquant, 2012).

Psychology has not only been swept along by the shift towards neoliberalism, it has also championed research that pushes the neoliberal agenda. As Adams et al., (2019) argue, the dynamic relationship between neoliberalism and psychology results in the understanding of individual behavior as one with an unfettered but ultimately illusory *sense* of freedom for the individual, afforded by a radical abstraction of experience from material and structural conditions and cultural settings. In the field of personality psychology, Teo (2018) argues that the neoliberal form of subjectivity has influenced topics such as positive psychology, happiness, the self, and agency. This ahistorical and decontextualized neoliberal psychology then results in the centering of the self as an ongoing entrepreneurial development project, in the reconceptualizing of well-being as a constituent of individual growth and personal fulfillment, and in the emphasizing of affect regulation as key to personal success. Perhaps the most direct aspiration of social psychology and neoliberal ideology is in Schwartz’s (2012) suggestion that, “we need psychologists whispering in the president’s other ear” to bring expert advice on human behavior into the highest levels of policy making. Obama’s Executive Order 13707 in 2015, “Using Behavioral Science Insights To Better Serve the American People” (National Archives and Records Administration, n.d.) is one iteration of that aspiration. A growing body of research suggests that the strongest attempt of this marriage between neoliberalism and psychology is in behavioral economics, a field that is deeply rooted in experimental social psychology (Adams et al., 2019; Leggett, 2014; Millward-Hopkins, 2017). Based on this critique of social psychology, and

psychology in general, Clegg and Lansdall-Welfare (2020) conclude that neoliberal theories are being actively transformed into policy through the work of applied social psychology, which “glosses over the social origin of most human difficulties” (pg. 1). They then conclude that mainstream psychology’s “alienated and individualist epistemology makes it a potent neoliberal institution rather than a discipline that can generate alternatives” (pg. 1).

When studying racism, social psychology does not account for structural and historical factors (Trawalter et al., 2020), thus resulting in the field’s study of racism as purely “in the head” (Salter et al., 2018). For instance, social psychology at times has taken the logical step in the neoliberal approach by advocating for racially marginalized people to be less vigilant, like their White counterparts, about perceiving racism (see Adams et al., 2019, pg. 12 for a number of articles). The blame is placed on the oppressed individuals’ tendencies to perceive racism, rather than the perceptibly racist society, for a variety of life outcomes (Adams et al., 2019). Thus, in a society that constantly pushes one to “pick oneself up by the bootstraps”, discrepancies in life outcomes between Black and White people are attributed to individual failings (or a “culture of poverty” among Black people) rather than an actively racist society. Obviously then, the burden of overcoming “underperformance” is placed on the oppressed by demanding they act like the proverbial John Henry to overcome structural constraints via sheer superhuman efforts (Bennett et al., 2004).

Racism’s historical and significant role lies in its destabilization and destruction of working-class solidarity—a role that is also, as was stated earlier, an aim of neoliberalism (Cox, 1948; Fields & Fields, 2014; Roediger, 1999). Social psychology’s limited understanding of racism can further weaken worker solidarity in capitalist society in various ways, if not by commission, then certainly by omission (Arfken, 2015, 2016). For instance, the race-based disparities in income can be explained away by a “culture of poverty” instead of considering how “the white wage” is used by capitalists to drive a wedge between workers of different races (Du Bois, 1935; Roediger, 1999). Further, the institution of policing, as will be detailed below, is a tool of repression of workers, especially those who are Black, Indigenous and people of color (BIPOC).⁵ Social psychology’s work is routinely being applied in police departments across the nation with the goal of reforming the individual police officers and departments, while actively denigrating (Luscombe, 2020) the call of defunding and abolishing the police. Again, by not supporting the calls to abolish the police, social psychologists support a system designed to repress the working class. Unsurprisingly, concerning the role of psychology vis-à-vis neoliberalism, Adams et al., (2019) conclude that, “Rather than a disinterested bystander, hegemonic forms of psychological science are thoroughly implicated in the neoliberal project.”

⁵ Even as we use the language of “BIPOC”, the paper is specifically about anti-blackness due to our research and community-organizing work. If we take struggles against settler-colonialism seriously, then the case against policing only gets vehemently stronger. However, given our lack of expertise and lack of material relations of solidarity with indigenous peoples and their struggles, the two of us cannot do service to the discussion of death and destruction policing has caused to/on Turtle Island and beyond.

Neoliberal Social Psychology Wants to Be Part of the Solution: “Racism Equals Power Plus Prejudice”

Social psychology’s beginnings were meandering, but if one is forced to select a single starting point, then 1908 might do; it was the year that William McDougall’s (1908) ‘An introduction to social psychology’ and Edward Ross’ (1908) ‘Social psychology’—the first two social psychology texts—were published. And if 1908 represents the field’s beginning then it is doubtful—to put it lightly—that social psychology started as an emancipatory field. Both McDougall and Ross were also eugenicists. Consider McDougall’s (1920) statement here,

“Although the greater part of Africa, perhaps the richest continent of the globe, has been in possession of the negro races during all the ages in which the European, Asiatic, and American civilisations were being developed, those races have never founded a nation... We may fairly ascribe the incapacity to form a nation to the lack of men endowed with the qualities of great leaders, even more than to the lower level of average capacity” (pp. 135-136).⁶

Moreover, Ross coined the term ‘race suicide’ (1907), that is, a belief in the threat that people from inferior racial groups will outbreed Whites—this certainly informed and motivated his work on eugenics. He lamented, “The theory that races are virtually equal in capacity leads to such monumental follies as lining the valleys of the South with the bones of half a million picked Whites in order to improve the conditions of four million unpicked Blacks” (Ross, 1907, p. 715).

The field’s more liberal beginnings also converge on a specific date: 1936—the founding of the Society for the Psychological Study of Social Issues (SPSSI). As SPSSI members, social psychologists were committed to examining more liberal concerns (i.e., “racial prejudice, class conflict, and war” [Binning & Sears, 2015], p. 18). It may be worth noting, however, that Gordon Allport—a former SPSSI president—when reviewing McDougall’s words above, remarked that his examination of racial differences was “brilliant” (Allport, 1929, p. 125). Neoliberal social psychology no longer relies on such problematic premises, and many in the field would affirm SPSSI’s call for interventions that address racism.

Unfortunately, even those theories in NSP that purportedly incorporate power dynamics miss the mark. Consider Operario and Fiske’s (1998) argument that “racism equals power plus prejudice”, which seems to obviate the need for our emancipatory psychology project because it seemingly brings in historical and institutional analyses into psychological analyses via the concept of power. In fact, their argument is routinely reflected in works on the social psychology of racism (Richeson & Sommers, 2016; Roberts & Rizzo, 2020), which is why we discuss it here in detail. In line with the neoliberal inner-logic to ultimately blame the individual (Foucault et al., 2008), their argument still treats prejudices as natural, universal and as the result of basic human tendencies (Operario & Fiske, 1998, p. 34 and p.41)—necessarily limiting the potential for radical and emancipatory responsibility, at both the individual and societal level. As Leach

⁶ A recent retracted article, Clark et al. (2020), was not far from this 1920 argument.

(2002) argues, an understanding of racism as a combination of power and prejudice still is unable to fully *disentangle* racism and prejudice because this understanding still views racist activity and all racism as ultimately “a function of weak personality, biased perception or ethnocentric categorization...[therefore placing] prejudice in the individuated person rather than in societal practices and institutions” (Leach, 2002, p. 440). Furthermore, even as Operario and Fiske (1998) foreground power in their equation, it is approached in an abstract and ahistorical manner.

Our current research project, IMP, concretely grounds the creation of American racism in the service of exploitation by settler-colonialism and capitalism. Operario and Fiske’s “power plus prejudice” formulation, on the contrary, downplays the role of power as merely “supplementing” prejudicial biases (p. 34)—in actuality, the term “hijacking” would have been more appropriate. In continuation with their argument of “supplementation”, their paper argues that “societal power...directs” (p. 35) or provides the “impetus” (p.38) or “exert[s] extra energy” (p.50) for the construction of racial categories. As we expand on this throughout the paper, this treatment of racial categorization is ahistorical, abstract, and universalizing—ultimately in line with neoliberalism. We also argue for an alternative language of “creates”, in place of “directs” or “impetus”, because that situates our project in the concrete and directly traceable history of the creation of transatlantic racism and racial categories—and the creation of the police for the enforcing of said racism in the service of capitalism and settler-colonialism (Fields & Fields, 2014).

Analysis such as those by Operario and Fiske (1998) leads social psychologists to routinely “not advise ridding society of the concept of race altogether” (p53; see also Richeson & Sommers, 2016; Roberts & Rizzo, 2020). Which then also explains, in what might be the most telling articulation of NSP, why the recent president of Association for Psychological Science pushes back against the BLM calls for defunding the police (Luscombe, 2020): if races are to continue to exist and race relations are to be managed, then, as we will discuss below, the police, though in much need of reform, cannot be defunded and dismantled. In sum, NSP is incapable of helping to build *emancipatory* solutions because it has yet to incorporate the structural and historical underpinnings of racism. So *how*, and perhaps equally important, *where*, exactly, should social psychologists committed to racial justice intervene?

Social Psychology Must Become an Emancipatory Science

“You can’t be neutral on a moving train... Events are already moving in certain deadly directions, and to be neutral means to accept that.” Zinn (1994, p. 8)

Fully recognizing social psychology’s ideological tendencies (by one estimate the ratio of liberals to conservatives in the field is greater than 10:1 and growing, Duarte et al. (2015)) and decades-long arguments over what role, if any, political values should play in the production of science (Brandt et al., 2014; Sears, 1994),

we nonetheless eschew contemporary calls for value neutrality (Stevens et al., 2018). Such calls are often value-laden themselves (Flyvbjerg, 2014; Petras, 2015), as they prioritize protecting the public image of ideological groups (i.e., conservatives) over solving large-scale social problems (i.e., racism). Consider Tetlock (1994), who claimed that “To label someone a racist, or to label support for a viewpoint as racist, is to pass moral-political judgment on that individual or viewpoint. Standards of evidence need to be exceptionally clear in passing such judgments” (p. 513). To use a current (and rather poignant) example, we think social psychologists would be better off in having the temerity to name President Joe Biden’s solution, for the police to shoot their assailants “in the leg instead of the heart”⁷ as a way to avert the killing of civilians, as racist rather than being timorous about how such labeling would affect his moral status—lest social psychologists recognize their own call for problematic reforms in his solutions.

In a world plagued with oppression, exploitation, and ecological annihilation, there can be no neutral social science, and social psychology is no exception: either we are firmly a “science for the people” (Gampa & Sawyer, 2021) or we, by omission or commission, aid in the continued oppression of the people. An emancipatory science is a dialectic of two contrasting impulses. In one direction, it critiques and deconstructs our ontologies, epistemologies, and applications of our science vis-à-vis forms of oppression and exploitation. In the other direction, as a “science for the people”, it helps to envision and support new capacities for overcoming said forms of oppression and exploitation (Martin-Baro, 1996; Parker, 2007; Watkins & Shulman, 2008). An emancipatory social psychology, to reiterate, is one that “empowers people to evaluate society and change it” (Ratner, 2015). In other words, we propose transforming neoliberal social psychology into an intersectional Marxist psychology, an unambiguously emancipatory project that expands the “social” and the “situation” by integrating historical analyses and incorporating a critical understanding of the structural, i.e., capitalism, racism, and heterocetera-patriarchy⁸. Echoing Marx (1845), expanding this understanding is not only for the purpose of interpreting human behavior but for changing human behavior.

The framework utilized in this paper has affinities with macro-cultural psychology (Ratner, 2011) and other applications of Marxism to psychology—i.e., situating the psychological within the structural (e.g., Arfken, 2017, 2018; Foster, 1999; Vygotsky, 1997). Other intersecting points include Arfken’s (2015) use of a Marxist critique to bring to light the liberal foundations of the cognitive revolution in psychology along with the field’s “commitment to an atomistic and mechanistic view of psychological explanation” (p.26). Foster (1999) argued that the Marxist tradition provides some necessary corrections to the various ways orthodox psychology accounts for and studies racism. Specifically, for Foster, the new understandings of racism in psychology throughout the 20th century, such as racism as prejudice and stereotyping, racism as intergroup relations, and racism

⁷ <https://www.yahoo.com/video/biden-suggests-police-could-shoot-assailants-in-the-leg-instead-of-the-heart-201750470.html>

⁸ Lorde, A. (1984). *Sister outsider: Essays and speeches*. Crossing Press.

as discursive/rhetorical, all potentially further racism by ignoring its structural underpinnings.

Our work complements and extends these prior Marxist psychological works in two specific ways. Firstly, unlike Ratner & Silva (2017), who consider anti-racist demands within capitalism to be a distraction from class struggle, we take for granted that antiracism work is integral to fighting U.S. capitalism (Sawyer & Gampa, 2018). This need for antiracist struggle as central to the fight against capitalism will be made most overt in the connections that we will elaborate between policing and the necessary need for controlling the working class, especially BIPOC, under capitalism. In examining the deep intertwining of racist oppression and capitalist exploitation, our approach is intrinsically intersectional in its Marxism (Combahee River Collective Statement, 1977; Taylor, 2016). Secondly, we center the oppressed as agents of collective liberation, and support social movements, activism, and other efforts to transform our society “from below” (Le Blanc, 2016). Building on prior work on Marxist psychology and our interventions to said work leads us to the earlier discussed elements of our approach, namely: investigating the individual police and their brutality from a structural and historical perspective, which leads one to conclude the police as a tool of repression that needs to be abolished; such a conclusion requires radical anti-capitalist solutions against police brutality and racism; the oppressed and exploited are not just seen as recipients of the solutions designed by social psychologists but are seen as the principle agents of change whose experiences and analyses become primary drivers of social psychological research; and finally, what follows from the prior three elements is that all resources ought to be democratically controlled and allocated in a manner that respects the growing call to defund and abolish the police.

At the core of IMP is the understanding that psychology should be implicated in dismantling oppressive and exploitative societal structures. As opposed to the dominant practice in social psychology of grounding individual psychology in the immediate situational (or even institutional) context, the Marxist approach situates psychology within a dynamic, social structure with a history of development—one that is rife with social contradictions and revolutionary possibilities.

An Intersectional Marxist Psychology – The Case of Police Racism

To better understand the psychology of police brutality and the racism exhibited by police officers, IMP should start with a serious consideration of the social, economic, and political history of the police as an institution—the first element of our approach. By gaining this historical and sociological context, psychology can make better sense of what seems to be systematic racism exhibited by police officers, rather than reformulating the problem into a clinical question of “a few bad apples” or into a set of racial associations that might be easily shifted by implicit bias or procedural justice trainings. Just to illustrate how deeply racism is woven into policing, even the FBI has recognized and warned about systematic

infiltration of police departments by White supremacist networks (Speri, 2020), from a neo-Nazi gang formed by Los Angeles police who targeted Black people and Latinos (Tobar, 1991), to White supremacist officers in Virginia (Jones & Murphy, 2019), to officers and entire agencies with connections to White supremacist groups in Ohio, Illinois, and Texas (Downs, 2016). This requires answering what is it about policing that has made police departments such fertile ground for recruitment by fascist and White supremacist groups, and what makes it an apparently useful tool for the furtherance of their political aims.

The police as an institution came into being relatively recently, making its first historical appearance in England and the U.S. between the 1820s to 1850s, and spreading to a number of urbanizing capitalist societies. As counterintuitive as it may seem today, *there were no standing bodies or social institutions dedicated to the policing of society before the rise of modern capitalism* (Whitehouse, 2014). Crucially, the formation of modern police departments was not undertaken as a response to a rise in crime (Gordon, 2005). Rather, the purpose of police was to control and subdue large, unruly crowds that posed political challenges. In England and the U.S., some of the first goals of policing were to control defiant strikers in England, urban rioters in the Northern U.S., and the imminent threat of enslaved insurrectionists in the U.S. South. By comparison, under feudalism, the ruling rural landholders recruited armed forces on an ad hoc basis to quell revolts or unrest among serfs who were bound to the land and worked in conditions approximating slavery (Whitehouse, 2014).

In the 1700s, as capitalism developed in England, the government forced peasants off the land and into cities to live and work (Fairlie, 2009). Social inequality widened between these new workers and the bosses who employed them in ever-larger workshops. Crowds of workers became rebellious under these conditions, with strikes and demonstrations increasing in size and number from the 1790s to 1820s. The army was sometimes ordered to fire into these crowds, or constables would arrest and hang the leaders of the rebellion, but both of these responses often produced further rebellion in the name of the martyrs who were killed. Constables were different from modern police in that (1) they did not patrol or do detective work, (2) there were typically only small numbers of them on duty, and (3) they acted as emissaries of the court who carried out summonses and arrest warrants (Whitehouse, 2014). The increasingly wealthy capitalists would soon find that the combination of constables and ad hoc use of soldiers was insufficient to retain control as class struggle began to intensify during the industrial revolution.

The London Metropolitan Police was formed in 1829, with the new tactic of inflicting *non-lethal* (for the most part) violence to disperse crowds and avoid creating martyrs. When not massed together to confront crowds, the police were dispatched primarily to poor and working-class neighborhoods to surveil and police the streets and daily life. As Whitehouse (2014) puts it, this dual role is the hallmark of modern police, “There is the dispersed form of surveillance and intimidation that’s done in the name of fighting crime; and then there’s the concentrated form of activity to take on strikes, riots, and major demonstrations.” Importantly, daily patrolling gets the police practiced in the art and mindset of

inflicting non-lethal violence for the “public good” so that they are prepared to do so on a larger scale when a mass social movement or strike arises.

The New York City police department was founded in 1845, on the heels of urban riots throughout the 1820s and 1830s and inspired by the London Metropolitan Police (Brandl, 2019), and constituted an expansion and professionalization of the part-time urban watch that had existed previously. A more centralized military-style chain of command was also instituted to make police more responsive to the needs of the ruling class. Meanwhile, in the U.S. South, the forerunners of the police were slave patrols, composed of White volunteers with their own weapons who roamed the countryside terrorizing and brutalizing slaves into submission (Brown, 2019). When some Black slaves were allowed to “live out” during agricultural off-seasons in towns like Charleston, SC, working and paying dues to their masters, these slaves developed lively communities separate from the plantation control mechanism. In response, during the late 1820s and 1830s these volunteer slave patrols were professionalized, and patrolled the city at all hours, carrying rifles with bayonets, with the specific aim of intimidating the Black community, curtailing their political activity, and harassing their daily life (Whitehouse, 2014). Thus, anti-Black racism was built into Southern police forces from the start (Brown, 2019), just as Northern police forces disproportionately targeted growing urban Black and Irish populations (Whitehouse, 2014).

As we have seen, not only do the police directly repress working class militancy by wielding force against crowds and social movements, but they also use racism to divide workers while carrying out their daily surveillance, intimidation, and arrests chiefly in working-class and poor neighborhoods of color. All of this is carried out in the racially-coded name of “fighting crime” and maintaining “law and order,” obscuring their fundamental purpose. In other words, police institutions are designed to buttress race and class inequalities. Racism has been baked into policing since its beginning, as slave patrols were transformed into Jim Crow policing in the U.S. South, and urban management of the working class and freed slave populations became ghetto policing in the Northern U.S. (Vitale, 2017).

Given the social role that policing has always played in maintaining capitalist order by acting as a coercive and disruptive force against oppressed and exploited communities, it should come as no surprise that police officers have been found to have a greater social dominance orientation than other legal actors, such as public defenders and jurors, as well as university students (Sidanius et al., 1994). In other words, police officers tend to have greater preferences for non-egalitarian (hierarchical) intergroup relations (Gatto et al., 2010). Whether they possessed these attitudes upon joining the force or were socialized into it by repetitive coercive interactions with other officers (Gatto et al., 2010), this ideology facilitates the upholding of relationships that benefit capitalists over workers. A Marxist psychology is well equipped to investigate this connection between the sociohistorical, political, and institutional milieus that exist on a societal level, and the psychology of groups and individuals acting within these milieus.

While the individual police officer may sometimes hold progressive views, or even rarely come to reject the role of policing itself, the police institution has never historically “defected” to take the side of people struggling against oppression and exploitation. Unlike the military, which has often rebelled against its commanding officers’ dictates and taken the side of social movements (e.g., the 1917 Russian Revolution, U.S. soldiers during the war in Vietnam, or the Egyptian military in 2011 and 2013 during the Arab Spring) (Baywood, 2013), the police have always remained loyal to the capitalist class. This may be partly due to the fact that the military typically operates against the enemy “out there” beyond national borders, and thus are less likely to follow orders to use force against fellow citizens. The police, on the other hand, operate *exclusively* against the local population, or the “enemy at home,” and this has a conservatizing effect on their psychology. As James Baldwin (2016) wrote about the policing of Black people in U.S. cities, “The police are the hired enemy of this population. They’re quite stunningly ignorant and since they know they’re hated they’re always afraid. One cannot possibly arrive at a more surefire formula for cruelty.”

Many reforms can and have been demanded of the police, including instituting civilian complaint and oversight mechanisms, community policing, and requiring that police wear body cameras. In total, however, these reforms have done little to diminish the brutality or racial disparities in policing in the United States. Eric Garner was killed by NYC police officer Daniel Pantaleo in 2014 when the officer applied an *illegal* chokehold to Garner’s neck, as he shouted, “I can’t breathe!” *eleven* times. This was captured quite clearly on video and yet it was eventually announced (just before the 5-year deadline) that there will be no federal charges pressed against the officer (Benner, 2019). Most recently, Jayland Walker was shot more than 90 times by eight officers on June 27th, 2022, and there are hours of video recordings of this murder.

Because the police are routinely not charged or indicted, much less convicted, for crimes of police brutality, it is painfully obvious that body cameras will not do enough to check the institutional impunity with which police officers function. Furthermore, despite the fact that Black people have virtually no anti-Black implicit bias compared to White people (Sawyer & Gampa, 2018), police brutality and racism continue even in cities where police forces have substantial numbers of Black officers; for instance, in Baltimore, where Freddie Gray was killed at the hands of police (Taylor, 2016).

All of this suggests that more than an individualistic psychology, or even a social psychology that admits of an immediate social situation and cultural factors, is required to understand and transform the racism and violence intertwined in institutions such as U.S. policing. Again, we submit that IMP would be better equipped to address the challenge of accurately explaining such *social* situations.

Situational, Institutional, And Structural Levels of Analysis

In order to situate social psychology within a structural analysis we integrate the aforementioned Marxism “from below” approach outlined by Le Blanc (2016) with the levels of power metaphor introduced by Alford and Friedland (1985; as cited in Wright, 2015). Thus, when considering racism as “power plus prejudice” (Operario & Fiske, 1998), it is necessary to think of power as operating on different levels: structural power, institutional power, and situational power. Using the metaphor of “playing a game” (Wright, 2015), structural power corresponds to struggles over *what game ought to be played*, institutional power corresponds to struggles over the *rules within a game*, and situational power relates to *possible moves within a game*, given a fixed set of rules.

Table 3. Explanation for Levels of Analysis.

Level of Analysis	Metaphor	Definition
Situational	Possible moves within a game	Concerned with the actions and/or the immediate situation of the individual; interactions between individuals.
Institutional	Rules within a game	Concerned with policies within institutions (e.g., schools, police, housing, etc.) and potential reforms of those institutional policies and actions.
Structural	What game ought to be played	Concerned with society as a systemic whole, transformation of overall political and economic arrangements, and systems (e.g., capitalism, socialism, social-democracy, etc.)

Ascending through the levels, NSP operates primarily on the situational, investigating racism at the level of the individual and the interpersonal—potentially erasing any relationship to institutions, cultures, and structures (Adams et al., 2019; Trawalter et al., 2020). On the institutional level, cultural psychology in particular explores the way that cultures within institutions promote and facilitate racist and racialized behaviors, attitudes, and emotions. Within this framework, individuals are seen as selecting and amplifying cultural resources, artifacts, and contexts that exacerbate racism (Adams et al., 2019). What is missing on the institutional level, i.e., the cultural-psychology approach, is an analysis of the political economy that underlies cultural institutions—the material motivations for creating, nurturing, and perpetuating racist practices and police in the first place (Gordon, 2005). Because of this missing foundation, a structural-level analysis of racism is required to understand and incorporate the economic and political forces that generate racist cultural norms and institutions.

Below, we expand on the concept of levels of analysis by examining widely-considered solutions to police brutality from social psychology. This is

not an exhaustive coverage of solutions being offered to reform policing; they are some of the more visible solutions that help to illustrate our arguments (see Abrams (2020) for more social psychology solutions beyond reforming policing). First, we discuss implicit attitudes and trainings, which are situational-level solutions. We then consider procedural justice and the behavioral insights model, both of which put forth situational-level and institutional-levels solutions to police brutality. We then discuss cultural psychology as another approach providing institutional-level changes and finally we provide our own approach as one that incorporates all the levels of the analyses: situational, institutional, and structural.

Implicit Racial Attitudes and Anti-Bias Interventions in Police Departments: Situational Levels of Analysis

Disproportionate police brutality against minorities (Scott et al., 2017) is of urgent concern, and one that many social psychologists have taken up as a research topic (Correll et al., 2007; Kahn & Davies, 2017). Currently, dozens of police departments across the country are being trained through implicit attitude trainings (Wallace et al., n.d.) to improve relationships between the police and the communities they police (Tyler et al., 2015). We thus center our first analysis of situational-level solutions on implicit racial attitudes and trainings.

Research in implicit racial attitudes has accumulated a convincing amount and variety of evidence to show that racism at an individual and interpersonal level is pervasive throughout our society. Implicit bias⁹ is recognized as a problem in schools, healthcare facilities, corporations, and police departments (Hoffman et al., 2016; Staats et al., 2015). Research and interventions centered around policing include laboratory work on racialized shooter biases (Correll et al., 2007; Cox et al., 2014). A central thrust of these interventions has been institutional, state, and national implementations of implicit bias reduction trainings.

In California, for example, more than 50 law enforcement executives from 28 departments trained with SPARQ (Social Psychological Answers to Real-world Questions, Stanford University's applied social psychology lab) to identify situations in which one is more likely to act on racial bias, in order to exercise greater control over such situations. Although a small sample relying only on self-report and lacking any behavioral measures, participants did report that they developed a better understanding of implicit bias and also believed that the course could help in *decreasing police-community tension* (Wallace et al., n.d). The Las Vegas Police Department (LVPD) worked with the Center for Policing Equity (CPE), a think tank led by a social psychologist that works with police departments to reform biased policing (Goff et al., 2013). They identified that disproportionate minority contact by police in their department occurred as a

⁹ We use the terms "bias" and "prejudice" without the adjective "racial" because that is the standard language in neoliberal social psychology. We, however, are not narrowly concerned with "prejudice" or "bias" in this paper, but racism: behaviors and attitudes against BIPOC by individuals, institutions and structures and created and encouraged by our current socio-economic system to continue to target BIPOC.

result of foot chases in POC communities. CPE helped implement a policy in which officers are not allowed to lay hands on suspects, given officers find it difficult to spot the potential for implicit bias during such chases. Instead, another officer would be required to step in if force was necessary (Richardson, 2015). Finally, the New York City police department, notorious for its punitive “zero tolerance” or “broken windows” policing (Jashnani et al., 2017), signed a \$4.5 million contract with for-profit implicit bias training company Fair and Impartial Policing (Baker, 2018). The focus on implicit attitude trainings is not just at the city and state level but is also one of the recommendations of the President’s Task Force on 21st Century Policing (2015) initiated by Barack Obama.

The growth in the study of implicit attitudes and their application in anti-bias trainings has been a mixed bag for anti-racism efforts. Though it has helped to dispel the pernicious myth that we are now in a post-racial, color-blind society, the evidence for anti-bias trainings improving attitudes and biases is mixed at best (Forscher et al., 2019). Most recently, the NYPD itself reported, “Overall, we found insufficient evidence to conclude that racial and ethnic disparities in police enforcement actions were reduced as a result of the [implicit bias] training” (Worden et al., 2020). In response to “null” results for behavioral changes in the NYPD implementation, social psychologists like Banaji, one of the pioneers of implicit cognition research, argue that trainings should not be mandatory as they could backfire (Kaste, 2020). Given that a disproportionate number of police officers hold racist views (LeCount, 2017), both before and increasingly during their career (Gatto et al., 2010; Sidanius et al., 1994), it is reasonable to assume that actively racist police officers, the very ones in need of training, will opt out of voluntary trainings. It is unclear how social psychologists deal with this impasse. IMP, however, would reveal that such interventions still leave the *purpose* of the police uninterrogated and unchallenged. For instance, an emancipatory approach would start by asking why POC are being chased through their own neighborhoods in the first place (Mooney, 2014), and what the psychological ramifications of these actions are. And, as we discuss later, a Marxist “from below” approach would reorient the social psychologist’s focus away from the efforts to maintaining social order and efficiency of police departments, and towards the benefit and health of communities that are currently being policed—which, we will also argue, necessitates heeding the call of social movements led by Black people and their allies to defund and abolish the police.

Procedural Justice: Situational and Institutional Levels of Analysis

Implicit bias is one significant contributor to what many social psychologists consider to be the central problem with policing: a lack of procedural justice that requires actively making changes on both the situational level and institutional level (Goff, 2017; Goff et al., 2017; Richardson, 2015; Tyler et al., 2015; Wallace et al., n.d; Weir, 2016). On the situational level, procedural justice

entails citizens being treated with respect by the police and experiencing police procedures and decisions as neutral and unbiased. On the institutional level, it entails changing and designing institutional policing policies to support and encourage changes on the situational level. The thrust of “policing for the 21st century,” from the procedural justice perspective, is to transform the police “force” to a police “service” and the culture within the police departments from that of “warriors” to “guardians” (President’s Task Force, 2015).

Some specific implementations of procedural justice are the required use of body cameras by the police and the use of checklists and protocols (e.g., the aforementioned policy change in foot chases) to ensure that every interaction follows the same procedure, regardless of the race of the suspect. Greater transparency and access to police data collected by police departments is another increasingly implemented aspect of procedural justice. Over 100 law enforcement departments have committed to release data on various police actions such as use-of-force, vehicle stops, and searches and arrests. For example, the Austin Police Department (APD) worked with the CPE and the White House’s Police Data Initiative to examine the behavior of their police officers. Data analyses indicated disparities based on race and ethnicity in vehicle-based stops and use of force. As a result, the APD has recently adopted a policy that an officer may be terminated immediately if his or her camera is deactivated without appropriate justification during a deadly force incident (Goff et al., 2017).

This shift towards procedural justice is not meant to replace deterrence and force but is meant to be an *additional motivation for the public* to act in accordance with “social-order maintenance” (Tyler et al., 2015). The deterrence approach focuses narrowly on the rational choice-making of the potential criminal, i.e., by making the costs of illegal behavior higher than any potential benefits. Procedural justice, by contrast, is meant to appeal to people’s belief in a just world and their need for a broader social meaning and sense of belonging. As Tyler et al. (2015) state, “The effects of punishment should be supplemented by building legitimacy and drawing on its motivational power to further enhance efforts at *maintaining social order*” (p. 78, emphasis ours).

Our primary concern here isn’t on the relative effectiveness (or lack thereof) of procedural justice implementations. However, it bears mentioning that a meta-analysis of seventy studies showed body-worn cameras have no statistically significant effect on either officer behavior or *citizens’ view of the police* (Lum et al., 2019), and that the APD program mentioned above now reports a number of compliance issues, including a lack of review of the footage by supervisors— “The audit said of the 151 videos in the audit, they found one that had been reviewed by a supervisor” (Bradshaw & Wilson, 2019).

We are primarily concerned with two assumptions fundamental to social psychologists’ collaborations with police which almost always go unexamined. First assumption, that a society is better off with rather than without police: “It is equally clear that there are problems when there is little or no policing. The impact of police presence is especially striking when compared to zero policing” (Tyler et al., 2015, p. 79). On the contrary, there is evidence suggesting that a

reduction of assertive policing, or even elimination of policing as a whole, would actually *reduce* major crime (Sullivan & O’Keeffe, 2017). For example, when NYC police officers temporarily reduced their “proactive policing” of low-level offenses in 2015 (in protest to their perceived mistreatment by NYC’s mayor over cases of police brutality), reports of major crimes occurring in the city actually *decreased*, based on the NYPD’s own crime statistics (Sullivan & O’Keeffe, 2017). Second assumption, that the maintenance of the social order and status quo is a natural and positive goal to pursue: “The central argument that flows from this research is that the psychological theories underlying legitimacy and procedural justice are a viable basis for constructing models of social-order maintenance” (Tyler et al., 2015, p.87). In other words, social psychologists are working to bolster an explicitly system-justifying psychology when it comes to the role of police in maintaining the social status quo. A Marxist turn in social psychology interrogates the impact of existing social institutions, including the police, on individual attitudes and behaviors and seeks the social and psychological sources to help radically transform them.

Behavioral Insight Model: Situational And Institutional Levels of Analysis

We next discuss the behavioral insight model (BIM; Goff, 2017), for multiple reasons. One, it is also an approach that embraces both the individual- and institutional-level changes. Two, it is being advocated as a corrective for the traditional civil rights model (TCRM) of fighting racism and police brutality—a model that is singular in its push against the status quo. Finally, proponents of BIM, who work with dozens of police departments¹⁰, have a wide audience outside of academia—for instance TED talks¹¹ with more than 2 million times and a presentation at World Economic Forum¹². For Goff (2017), the TCRM supposes the police to be bigoted at worst and ignorant or apathetic at best and thus relies on direct action, protests, and legal battles to fight racism and to respond to police brutality. Goff (2017) contends that these tactics take an “adversarial approach” to police, and this could lead to worse relations between police and “the communities they are sworn to protect”. BIM is meant as a “less antagonistic” model that is based on the fundamental social psychological premise that the situation one is in can have more power than one’s attitude in shaping one’s behavior, including racial discrimination (Goff, 2017). Therefore, it argues, we should focus on identifying which situations improve or worsen interactions between the police and the public. An example of the implementation of BIM is the aforementioned case of scripts for foot chases in the LVPD or the camera use policy by the APD.

¹⁰ Centering Community to Spur Progress. <https://2021.policingequity.report/>

¹¹ Goff, P. A. (n.d.). *How we can make racism a solvable problem -- and improve policing*. TED. https://www.ted.com/talks/dr_phillip_atiba_goff_how_we_can_make_racism_a_solvable_problem_and_improve_policing

¹² Tackling racism in business through data analysis. <https://policingequity.org/newsroom/media-coverage/tackling-racism-business-through-data-analysis>

The BIM goes beyond simply focusing on the situation and makes room for the moral authority of the police. As is explicitly stated, “By working backward from the disparity without an *a priori* theory about police officers’ character, the BIM allows researchers to assume (either strategically or genuinely) that all actors involved intend to do the morally just thing” (Goff, 2017, p.13). This moral assumption is in line with the procedural justice approach, along with its *prima facie* assumption about the police as “sworn to protect” BIPOC communities. Such an assumption, apart from making little room to question policing and police officers as a naturalized requirement of a society, is ahistorical, as discussed earlier, and ignores how the structural priorities/policies and ideology of policing *actively* socialize cops to be racist (Alexander, 2010; Gatto et al., 2010). It also erases how police institutions facilitate the intricate networks of fascists, White supremacists, and other misanthropes within police departments, which have been brought to light under various investigations. In fact, police officers who are the most willing to use force against political demonstrations are routinely promoted, which means callous brutality toward oppressed and working people is directly encouraged within police departments (Williams, 2015). Stated explicitly, “Police violence is very frequently overdetermined—promoted from above and supported from below” (Williams, 2015, p. 30). The only just approach to a repressive force is demanding abolishment, a most antagonistic demand.

If BIM is based on the idea that situations are often more powerful predictors of human behavior than attitudes, why not consider the fact that under racialized capitalism such “situations” that encourage racism and violence on the part of police will constantly recur due to the social and political role that police play? In other words, why is the scope of the situation not allowed to expand beyond the immediate temporal and interpersonal level, or even the cultural level of particular police departments? Because such an expansion would betray the narrow definition of social situations that is a hallmark of NSP. The study of cultural practices, and the socio-economic relations that underpin them, is necessary in order to propose actionable changes that can transform extended, dynamic situations by construing them as outcomes of cultural institutions and not as discrete events.

Cultural Psychology: Institutional Level of Analysis

Not only is the role of the police as a permanent fixture of society not questioned in the work of the social psychologists discussed so far, but there are direct collaborations with police being formed at institutional and cultural levels—e.g., the city level (Goff et al., 2017), state level (Wallace et al., n.d.), and national level (President’s Task Force, 2015). This institutional-cultural connection is the level of analysis and criticism that cultural psychologists argue needs to be considered in order to help dismantle racism. Among efforts to achieve institutional- cultural changes, is the increasing call for community policing that encourages positive and nonenforcement contact between the police and

communities. In one of the few experimental studies on community policing, Peyton et al. (2019) found that even a single instance of 10-minute “positive and nonenforcement” interaction by police officers resulted in improved public attitudes towards the police and willingness to cooperate. Notably, these results persisted after 21 days. Most disconcerting, however, is the finding that after the interaction, participants increased their support of *expanding* the police force by 10%! Precisely due to such system-justifying outcomes, Dixon et al. (2012) are critical of intergroup contact interventions because they can result in the marginalized group reevaluating and downplaying structural problems after the intervention. Additionally, such cultural-level changes limit the understanding of “culture” to the culture of an institution, but do not take into consideration the culture that the structures, such as capitalism and racism, create and perpetuate, and which police institutions uphold.

Taking for granted that the psychological and cultural are “inseparable outgrowths of one another,” Salter et al. (2018) explicitly call for a fight against racism grounded in the cultural, where they define culture on a level that takes into consideration racism, *though not capitalism*. Such critical cultural psychologists, rather than *situating* racism in an individual’s beliefs, attitudes, and behaviors, go further by situating the pervasiveness of racism in a “set of ideas, practices, and materials embedded in the structure of everyday cultural worlds” (Salter et al., 2018). According to this view, culture promotes and facilitates racialized experiences, behaviors, and emotions, while individuals select and shape the context within which racism operates.

One feature of such a cultural psychology is that it incorporates into psychological analyses the fact that the roots of current forms of racism are located in the historical conditions of colonialism and the transatlantic slave trade. For example, in education this relationship is enforced in a manner that constantly privileges the oppressor (Whites) at the expense of the oppressed (BIPOC). Unsurprisingly, White-American students see little to no racism in U.S. society because they are relatively ignorant about any critical knowledge concerning historical racism (Nelson et al., 2013).

Recognizing the limitation of a “Psychology” that has “focused almost exclusively on individual bias” when concerning racism, Trawalter et al. (2020) call for a socioecological psychology of racism, an approach resonant with critical cultural psychology. This approach harks back to Lewin’s (1939) social psychology that included history and structures in the “social”, not just the immediate situation. In the context of policing, Trawalter et al. (2020) suggest that a socioecological approach should take into consideration the history of the modern police force in that it “stems from Slave Patrols and Night Watches in the American South, and constables in New England” (p. 49), and that current policing adheres to a racist ideology that permeates the structures of policing. Ultimately, beyond behavioral changes among police officers, they argue that socioecological psychology might reveal that increasing the trust in police among oppressed communities “will likely require a *reconciliation* process for contending with a history of abuses” (p. 49; emphasis ours).

Both critical cultural psychology and socioecological psychology models of racism suggest that the solutions to racism should ultimately be to destabilize Western colonialism and imperialism. Such an analysis rooted in historical conditions goes far in showing the temporal durability of racism in the US and can lead to concrete reforms that include removing Confederate monuments from public spaces or increasing accessibility to Black studies in universities (Salter et al., 2018). But Salter et al. (2018) state, “Hegemonic commemoration practices...tend to achieve prominence because they resonate with powerful interests,” (p. 153). Although we agree, it is from this premise that we diverge. Their concern is the way ordinary people (i.e., the ones without hegemonic power) “shape collective memory by selecting or reproducing some features of the past while deselecting or omitting others” (p. 153). Our concern is with the political and economic structures and elite class interests that undergird the aforementioned powerful interests and hegemonic practices. In prior work, we have examined the role of social movements in aggregate implicit attitude change (Sawyer & Gampa, 2018; 2022), as such we see considerable promise in examining social movements and other forms of struggle and activism that directly challenge the racist structures that gave rise to police in the first place.

Similarly, Arfken (2015) warns that, while such cultural analyses are intended to critique Western imperialism, they inadvertently make culture an ever-more obscure entity by ignoring the socio-economic relations underlying cultural practices (p. 29). As an illustration, consider Salter et al. (2018) comment, “Europeans constructed their identity as “White” and imagined themselves as more developed and more human in comparison with the darker-skinned “others” (whether African or indigenous) whom they dominated” (p. 151). From our IMP perspective, a more accurate reading of history, one that applies intersectional analysis by incorporating anti-capitalism, is that *some* ruling-class Europeans constructed racism to serve a very particular *purpose*: that of preempting and annihilating growing worker solidarity and resistance to colonialism at the beginning of capitalism (Allen, 1994; Fields & Fields, 2014). Racism today is no longer just about the destruction of working-class solidarity; it has become its own fully-fledged form of oppression. However, it is not irrelevant to the needs of capitalism. Erasing the role of class politics in the roots of racism makes it harder to envision emancipatory practices, which might explain why ultimately Trawalter et al. (2020) limit their vision to a “reconciliation” with police, not policing's abolishment. As Fields and Fields (2018) would argue, even such a historical understanding of racism, “looks like a relation between people or race relations, but it’s really a submerged economic relation”. In other words, even a psychology that takes into consideration a more historical approach to racism but ignores the relationship to capitalism can be one that is in line with neoliberalism to the extent that the role of capitalism is obscured, and consequentially the structures aren’t deemed fundamentally blameworthy.

In the long span of writing this paper, an article explicitly titled, “*Toward a Psychological Science of Abolition Democracy: Insights for Improving Theory and Research on Race and Public Safety*” was published. While it discusses

concerns similar to those raised in this paper, it ultimately falls short of *explicitly* calling for the abolition of the police. Instead, they urge psychologists to “engage seriously with abolition democracy by locating the source of contemporary policing problems in slavery and historical racism” (Najdowski & Goff, 2022, p. 64). Such a framing is seemingly in line with our push for incorporating historical and structural analyses into psychological sciences but again incomplete insofar as it narrowly and exclusively locates the origin of policing in slavery and racism. What is missing is the centrality of capitalism, in addition to racism, which requires the repressive role of policing in order to keep workers’ organizing activity in check against increasing inequalities. Their framing makes the problems in policing appear only as a legacy of slavery rather than seeing policing as an essential, dynamic, and ever-present feature of capitalism (Gilmore, 2007). The paper cites Akbar (2020), Davis (2005), Kaba (2017), and of course Du Bois (1935), who all *explicitly* grounded an abolitionist framework in an *anti-capitalist* framework, yet this line of analysis is missing in the paper. Their cited references might differ in their means but not in their desired end: abolition. There is not even a dismissal, much less discussion, of the anti-capitalist commitment in the references that Najdowski and Goff (2022) cite, leaving the reader to wonder if, in line with Margaret Thatcher, they believe “There is no alternative!”. Our paper, however, furthers an intersectional argument against policing by incorporating both anti-capitalist and anti-racist frameworks—one that can be useful in advocating for police abolition in not just the USA but anywhere policing serves capitalism.

Intersectional Marxist Psychology: Situational, Institutional, and Structural Levels of Analysis

Hamid Khan, an organizer for *Stop LAPD Spying Coalition*, provided a simple litmus test for evaluating reforms: are reforms being put in place to justify oppressive systems *or* are they being put in place to support working-class people and marginalized people? Anti-bias trainings and social psychological interventions of implicit bias that operate on the situational level, and procedural justice interventions that operate on the institutional level, do not align with marginalized people in so far as they are incapable of connecting the blunt end of police brutality with a racist and capitalist society that necessarily requires policing. Tyler et al. (2015) grounds their work in the explicit assumption that there would be major social problems if there were little to no policing, and that the police serve and protect the public under difficult circumstances (p. 77). Similarly, Eberhardt, recent president of Association for Psychological Science, dismisses the call to defund the police as “...a call for defunding that is based on the feeling that the police are bad and that there’s nothing that could be done, no, I don’t support that...There are a lot of levers that we can move to bring about more equitable policing” (Luscombe, 2020).

Neoliberal social psychology’s goal, then, is to improve policing such that the public comes to “...trust in the *benevolence* and *sincerity* of police in their

dealings with the public” (Tyler et al., 2015; p. 76; emphasis ours), by offering interventions to police departments. Thus, one core assumption of NSP is that the overrepresentation of groups like Black people and trans people among those incarcerated in the U.S. is primarily the result of officers’ implicit biases (Spencer et al., 2016). However, regaining “credibility” (Tyler et al., 2015) in the eyes of the public is not a new project, but was in fact propounded in the 19th century by Robert Peel, the founder of the London police department, who referred to this as “policing by consent” (Lentz & Chaires, 2007). Further evidence of supporting the status quo is that CPE researchers signed a memorandum of understanding with police departments to protect police from liability issues and from the requirement to disclose sensitive data after anticipating that police departments might be unwilling to share the data they gather for several reasons, including public relations and potential liability. This agreement also guarantees that police departments have the right to receive the results of any research before the public receives it, to remain anonymous if the results are published, and to be given *reasonable* time to implement solutions or *to do nothing* (Goff et al., 2017; p. 392). The glaring problem is that by not allowing room for questioning the necessity of policing, agreements between police and psychologists ultimately concede power to the oppressor *against the expressed needs of the oppressed*, severely limiting any accountability towards community stakeholders.

Clearly, social psychologists cannot assume that police have benign intentions; furthermore, they cannot accept the maintenance of social order as necessarily being a worthy goal. While socioecological psychology and critical cultural psychology approaches might be amenable to police reforms that are more in line with the explicit demands of BLM and their allies, they do not make such approaches explicit. An emancipatory psychology, in contrast, is fundamentally aligned with efforts made by ordinary citizens to hold the police accountable in meaningful ways—for example, by winning the power to hire and fire them, and to control their budgets, or in completely abolishing them if the community deems it necessary. One starting point for such an emancipatory psychology can be scrutinizing the process by which social psychologists enter into memorandums with the police on behalf (or over the heads) of the public, as well as the results of these agreements.

An IMP is clearly needed to help us discriminate between the deceptive and transformative solutions, between the reforms that support the status quo and the reforms that are in solidarity with, and accountable to, the struggles of marginalized people. Critical participatory action research (CPAR)¹³ is one of the methodologies that are most useful for such a psychology, because it is a framework for conducting research in solidarity with “communities, groups, and individuals living at the margins, that is those with relatively little sociopolitical power” (Fine et al., 2020, pg. 2). Making the oppressed genuine partners, and having their experiences and analyses drive social psychological research, opens

¹³ We are rarely exposed to such methods in a typical social psychology program. As a past participant, I (Anup Gampa) highly recommend attending the Critical PAR Institute (<https://publicscienceproject.org/critical-par-institutes/>)

up the possibility to discuss and decide how to democratically control and allocate resources in a manner that respects the growing call to defund and abolish the police—therefore incorporating multiple elements of IMP.

The Public Science Project at City University of New York, and particularly their Morris Justice Project (Jashnani et al., 2017), is an example of work that understands that oppressors virtually never yield power without the oppressed fighting for it (Davis, 2016). This CPAR project, a collaboration between psychologists, primarily BIPOC residents, and organizers, focused on the neighborhood-level effects of the New York Police Department's "stop and frisk" policy, in which officers stopped, questioned, and searched civilians deemed to be "suspicious", disproportionately targeting people of color. This activism brought public pressure that contributed to the ending of the program. Of course, police resisted this public pressure for as long as they could and warned that crime would skyrocket if the program were ended. Against their claim, crime dropped to record lows following the abandonment of stop and frisk (Equal Justice Initiative, 2019). This instance underscores the need for further, explicit CPAR approaches, as well as approaches that engage with the oppressed outside of formal, psychological-research frameworks. This can include studying and partnering with existing social movements.

Taking a structural-level analysis, i.e., asking "should we be playing this game?", requires us to meaningfully engage with the biggest social movement to fight racism in recent history, and one that explicitly demands the abolishing of police—the BLM movement. As discussed above, there is little evidence for any durable effects of implicit-attitude interventions in changing people's anti-Black attitudes. Even the purported "Obama effect", i.e., the notion that the presidency of Barack Obama should have the power to induce a progressive shift in implicit attitudes at the societal level because he was the perfect instance of a high-status Black exemplar with unprecedented visibility and pervasiveness, has shown to be ineffective (Schmidt & Axt, 2016).

Looking back in our country's history, we know that Americans' explicit (fully consciously endorsed) attitudes toward desegregation and toward Black people in general changed immensely during the Civil Rights and Black Power movements of the 1960s and 1970s despite violent backlash and counter-movements (Bobo et al., 2012). Unsurprisingly, then, there is growing evidence both for the impact of the historical and structural contexts on individual attitudes and the impact of social movements in changing those attitudes. Payne et al. (2019), for instance, show that counties and states with greater dependency on Black slaves before the Civil War had higher levels of anti-Black implicit bias today among White residents. They explain these results partially through measures of structural inequalities, such as poverty, intergenerational mobility among White and Black residents, and housing segregation. The authors concluded that more attention needs to be paid to changing "social environments" rather than individual attitudes to effectively combat implicit bias. Political movements reach far more people for longer periods of time than scattered, short-term trainings. More importantly, they challenge the social

conditions and racial disparities that can breed and reinforce racist attitudes in the first place.

In the most comprehensive study to date of changes in aggregate implicit attitudes from 2007 to 2016, Charlesworth and Banaji (2019) found that implicit attitudes regarding sexual orientation, race, and skin-tone became less biased, while attitudes toward age and disability did not change, and implicit attitudes toward body-weight became more biased. From an IMP perspective, it stands to reason that social issues that are targeted by repeated social movements would have lower overall bias in related attitudes. U.S. history, for example, has witnessed multiple movements against racism and multiple struggles for gay liberation and LGBT rights, with BLM and the struggle for marriage equality being the latest high-profile incarnations. Thus, the finding that changing attitudes around race, skin-tone, and sexuality are related to lower overall bias levels for these attitudes (Charlesworth & Banaji, 2019) may reflect the impact of social movements on these attitudes. This idea is further supported in the negative by evidence that attitudes around age, disability, and body-weight either did not change or became more biased (Charlesworth & Banaji, 2019). None of those issues have been visibly central to mass social movements in recent decades.

In a direct application of testing the impact of social movements on implicit attitudes, Sawyer and Gampa (2018) examined implicit racial attitudes in relation to BLM. Implicit attitudes from 2009 to 2016 were less pro-White during BLM than pre-BLM, became increasingly less pro-White across BLM, and were especially less pro-White during high points of BLM struggle. There are several lines of standard social psychological theories for why social movements should have an impact on implicit attitudes. The associative-propositional evaluation (APE) argues that constant and pervasive exposure to exemplars like Obama may succeed in activating specific preexisting positive associations with Obama (e.g., powerful, accomplished), and as a result influence associative evaluations of Black people in general. However, these activations might be temporary and incapable of fundamentally altering one's association towards Black people in general because Obama, the exemplar, is individually specific. A social movement that repeatedly and literally pairs Black people in general with basic and positive words ("Black Lives Matter"), images, and traits (courageous, agentic) may cause more fundamental and lasting changes on the societal level as a result of systematically changing the underlying valence of associations with Black people (Sawyer & Gampa, 2018; 2022). "Bias in crowds", another line of research in support of the potency of social movements argues that implicit bias is fundamentally a feature of social contexts and not an individual trait. Specifically, implicit attitudes are temporary activations cued by stereotypes and inequalities. Even though implicit bias for any individual might be temporary and idiosyncratic, implicit bias at the aggregate level may mirror the durable inequalities in the social environment (Payne et al., 2017). Thus, BLM might also have changed the social context in which evaluative associations are formed.

Social movements like BLM are also in line with the frameworks outlined by Le Blanc (2016) and Wright (2015). Recall that these frameworks require one

to expand the understanding of the situation to consider the structural-level foundations of society with a historical analysis, with the intention of liberating that society by centering the oppressed and supporting their platforms and movements. Truly transformative demands, such as those from BLM, include ending mass incarceration, disarming the police, ending capital punishment, and establishing community control of local budgets and law enforcement.¹⁴ The website for the Movement for Black Lives also sets out the following radical goal:

Until we achieve a world where cages are no longer used against our people, we demand an immediate change in conditions and an end to all jails, detention centers, youth facilities and prisons as we know them. This includes the end of solitary confinement, the end of shackling of pregnant people, access to quality healthcare, and effective measures to address the needs of our youth, queer, gender nonconforming and trans families.¹⁵

In addition, community control would entail direct democratic control over all levels of law enforcement, “ensuring that communities most harmed by destructive policing have the power to hire and fire officers, determine disciplinary action, control budgets and policies, and subpoena relevant agency information.”¹⁶ Social movements like BLM, therefore, both challenge the structural conditions that breed racism, and provably alter the implicit bias attitudes that help to maintain it.

What if social psychologists took seriously the call to defund and abolish the police? We must resist the temptation of dismissing such an approach on the grounds of objectivity—remember, by working with police departments and supporting the calls to reform *but not* defund, social psychologists have already committed to biased work. Our call, therefore, is to be biased in favor of the oppressed. Methodologically, in order to further socioecological psychology, Trawalter et al. (2020) suggest measuring the impact on psychological outcomes and mechanisms as a result of both (1) exposures to structures and systems of racism, and (2) manipulating salience of historical harms or systems in lab experiments. Additionally, they advocate for leveraging natural experiments and testing associations between racist systems and psychological mechanisms and outcomes. These align well with our own call but are not enough.

Ultimately, an emancipatory psychological science is one that takes account of all three levels: it takes as given that individual-level changes and agency need to be investigated as that is the blunt end where much of police brutality occurs; it expands its scope to better understand how such brutality is perpetuated and supported; and it finally brings into view the forces for whom such police brutality is perpetuated for, which allows one to then understand and navigate the opportunities and limitations of fighting police brutality at the more concrete levels, i.e. the individual- and institutional-levels, with the ultimate aim of abolishing repressive systems.

¹⁴ *Vision For Black Lives*. M4BL. (2021, April 28). <https://m4bl.org/policy-platforms/>.

¹⁵ *Vision For Black Lives*.

¹⁶ *Vision For Black Lives*.

Conclusion

However, some might be wondering, “Is abolition too drastic? Can We really get rid of prisons and politicking all together?”
The short answer: We can. We must. We are.

Mariame Kaba¹⁷

Neoliberal policies have had devastating effects on Black people, and people of color in general. As a result of austerity policies, funding has been slashed across all social services, which disproportionately hurts marginalized communities. Agencies at all levels of government are disinvesting in housing (Desmond, 2016), education (Hursh, 2016), health services (Labonté & Stuckler, 2016), while unemployment or underemployment is increasing (Nunn et al., 2019). At the same time, homelessness, truancy, and mental health problems have been criminalized (e.g., Leifman, 2019). Evidence suggests that investing in non-carceral alternatives such as mental health resources and job trainings (Heller, 2014) have greater returns on investment for society than policing and incarceration of marginalized people. Yet, these alternatives are rarely well-funded because under the neoliberal regime of austerity and the neoconservative approach of punitiveness, the response to social discord is policing instead of understanding and addressing the underlying problems. The inevitable result is the disproportionate contact of marginalized communities with the police! No amount of tinkering with the dynamics of discrete situations involving police confrontations with citizens will alter this larger political trend. Addressing the root of the issues would require redistribution of wealth beyond trickle-down-economics and scrutinizing the systems responsible for the “need” and role of policing—to repress workers, especially BIPOC (Alexander, 2010; Vitale, 2017).

Black communities and their comrades have again responded to the latest incidents of police brutality with protests and riots across the nation, and across the globe. Louder than ever, they demand defunding, even abolishing, the police. Incredibly, various municipalities answered these demands with commitments to unprecedented reforms: Los Angeles has committed up to a \$150 million decrease in its \$1.8 billion budget; and the city council of Minneapolis, where George Floyd was killed, has committed to abolishing their police department! And, most recently, the police officer directly responsible for killing George Floyd was convicted of the murder.

We have reason to be optimistic, yet we are already seeing ways in which public demands are being routed. For instance, the Minneapolis public-school system severed ties with the police department, only to have the police replaced by former police, security, or correction officers—now called “public safety support specialists” (Cheney-Rice, 2021). Such a corruption of progress *is* American history. The promise of reconstruction was corrupted into the Jim Crow era (Du Bois, 1935). The promise of civil rights was corrupted into the

¹⁷ Kaba, M. (2021). *We do this' til we free us: Abolitionist organizing and transforming justice*. Haymarket Books.

New Jim Crow era (Alexander, 2010). This is what is at stake. A call for defunding or abolishing that is not made with an understanding of capitalism can be corrupted into a New Jim Crow era once again (Davis, 2016; Taylor, 2016). Though racism has been, at least in the Americas, instrumental in the expansion of capitalism, this certainly doesn't mean that it is just about economics anymore. However, if we are to strategize the way forward to fight for a society beyond racism, then we have to target one of the fundamental masters it serves. We have to attack capitalism.

It is with this anti-capitalist and anti-racist (not to mention anti-imperialist and anti-patriarchal) understanding that Angela Davis (2016) called for abolishing the police and warned against deceptive solutions of better prisons and better policing. In spite of her admonishment, and the rallying call for defunding the police and mounting evidence of the ineffectiveness of police trainings, social psychologists continue to push for police reforms that are out-of-step with the demands of the protestors, and even an increasing number of government agencies. In 2021, Los Angeles Review of Books published "Beyond Bias: The Case for an Abolitionist Psychology". This article is a rare exception in that it explicitly calls for police abolition from an intersectional and anti-capitalist perspective. It is entirely in line with the argument we make in this paper, perhaps without laying out the evidence and the arguments as extensively as we do here.

Demands of defunding and abolishing the police are bold and go to the heart of the problems with policing under capitalism, so much so that winning them would threaten the capitalist system itself, if not form a key demand of a revolutionary transformation of capitalism as a whole. In fact, because policing has been so integral to defending the social hierarchy and exploitation that are endemic to capitalism, it is difficult to imagine eliminating police forces without also eliminating capitalist society (Gordon, 2005). Maybe partly for this reason, discussions of policing within social psychology virtually never discuss the reduction or elimination of policing in its modern institutional form.

We are heartened by the exciting new proposals in social psychology that aim to expand the focus of the "social" by incorporating sociological and historical analyses. Most recently, Kraus and Torrez (2020) have argued for a shift in considering power as a trait-based variable to power as a construct embedded in societal hierarchies. Overall, their hope is "to understand power as it is experienced in the world, as a psychological process that is grounded in the institutions, identities, and group dynamics through which much of human behavior is experienced" (p. 88). We also embrace their approach to move social psychology out of the lab and into the field in order to test the limits of generalizability of current research on power. One implication of such a broadening, they argue, will allow us to investigate the impact of collective actions on individual-level power. However, their approach, along with the aforementioned proposals for expanding the concept of the social, such as the socioecological psychology of racism (Trawalter et al., 2020) and "bias of crowds" (Payne et al., 2017) only partially incorporate all of the elements of an IMP. For instance, what is left undefined in these approaches is whether power is

to be treated as a zero-sum game or as gradational. Evidence is starting to build that an explicitly antagonistic approach to class (workers vs. capitalists; i.e., zero-sum) provides a better understanding of worker alienation, in comparison to the socioeconomic status (SES; i.e., gradational) approach of social class (Sawyer & Gampa, 2020). This approach results from a historical understanding of capitalism as one that is at its core an exploitation of the majority of the population by a minority of the population. Such an understanding then also sheds light on the role of the police, as discussed earlier, and provides a roadmap for potential solutions to tackling police brutality. Most importantly, our approach makes it explicit that we eschew any misconceptions of neutrality, and work in solidarity with oppressed communities.

We hope that our framework will help other social psychologists to also envision how an intersectional Marxist psychology can provide structural and historical analyses of the relationship of the individual to the situation, and of the situation to its structural and historical context. We believe it will add to current efforts to incorporate more intersectional analysis in social psychology (Goff & Kahn, 2013), and believe it can help to combat the increasing number of plagues besetting us and looming upon future generations, from racism and exploitation to the climate crisis. Our framework can also bridge social psychologists with other areas of psychology, such as those in community psychology, that are also working on abolition (see Fernández in this issue). Ultimately, we hope abolition theory outlined here can be applied to psychological study of abolition of not just police and prisons, but also to other oppressive institutions such as work (Prole.info, 2014) and family (Lewis, 2019).

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The black failure of psychology – an errant walking away

Hugo ka Canham

Abstract

Since death is both emanant and imminent for black people living in an atmosphere of pervasive global racism, there is some consensus that to be black is to be deathbound.¹ Relatedly, it is a truism that to live close to death is to be in a perpetual dance that necessitates attentiveness to the rhythms of livingness or what keeps us clinging to life. To live close to death is therefore to be in a dance with death. In this paper, I mark the ways in which we die, the systems that kill us, our wrestle with death and oppressive power, and the resistance that is encoded in black dance. I turn to the wilful failure of psychology to apprehend black precarity, ways of dying, and resistance. I suggest that as a discipline, psychology is irredeemably colonial and unable to decolonise itself. Rather than arguing for an inclusive, black or African psychology that brings black death into the purview of the discipline, I succumb to hopelessness and turn to explore what emerges from black unmappability—from the failures of psychological registers of apprehension. Instead, I propose that by giving up on psychology, we might look to the providence of errantry and relation as black genres of seeing and care. These spaces are generative for holding black being and thinking with the black dance with death. The paper provides pathways away from the suffocating lenses of psychology. An errant walk towards black boundlessness.

Keywords

blackness, death, black errantry, livingness, complaint, dance

Since my introduction to psychology approximately 25 years ago, I have been adrift. The discipline has never quite felt right. It has spectacularly failed to explain black life as I know and live it, and it has been wilfully disinterested in theorising blackness. Moving between rural life where colonialism, apartheid, neoliberalism, and modernity have created extreme precarity—and my largely middle-class existence as a marginal body in academia—I have been struck by how the registers of psychological apprehension unsee the lives of so many people. My turn to community psychology and various strands of black and decolonial psychology have not quietened my sense of dis-ease. Approximately

¹ Claudia Rankine (2015) articulates this relationship to death.

five years ago, I began to lean into my alienation and to paddle away from the shore of psychology. Following Mignolo (2009, 172), I have repeatedly asked myself: “Why would someone be interested in advancing the discipline if not for either alienation or self-interest?” The response that I draw out in this paper is that I have resolved not to advance a discipline invested in my alienation. Unmoored, I found unexpected footing on which I currently stand—albeit unsteadily. The ground on which I now stand refuses rootedness and subjects itself to the motion of the tides. It has no allegiance to any discipline. It requires me to read widely and to think with knowledges hitherto understood as disparate. An inadequate name for this is transdisciplinary ground. Errant and seeking relation rather than stasis and replication (Glissant, 1997).

Through the register of black complaint, I next outline the failures of psychology to apprehend and attend to black life and death. I then turn to critique the ways in which black psychology’s embrace of the psy-complex continues a tradition missing the complexity of black life. I suggest that since blackness is the human’s abject other, it is always pathological and delayed when measured against Man. Here, *Man* is Sylvia Wynter’s (2003) monohuman at the top of the Chain of Being. Parker (1994) defines the psy-complex as the sprawling regulative network of theories and practices that make up psychology. To underscore both arguments about the failure of psychology and critiques of the psy-complex, I think with black death, the most overdetermined position of black life. Walcott (2013, p. 143) makes a simple but powerful observation when he notes: “Black people die differently”. Why does psychology misapprehend this difference? I conclude by pointing to the potentialities of refusing psychology in order to experience the providence of being unchained from discipline and therefore to be open to being led by people and communities with whom I co-theorise, resist and co-create.

Black Complaint!

To complain of the failures of Euro-American psychology’s influence and colonisation of the world is unoriginal but necessary to reiterate.² Keguro Macharia (2016) outlined a litany of complaints to register his discontent with how queer studies articulates a universalism that flattens African queer life and experience. Sara Ahmed (2021) similarly illustrated the value of the practice of complaint for unveiling the operation of institutional power at universities. Writing in the *Annual Review of Critical Psychology* in 2018, she observed:

I learnt how difficult it can be to make a complaint, how much work a complaint involves. Making a complaint is not completed by one action alone; you have to keep a complaint going. Students are often warned about making complaints; they are told that making complaints would damage their reputations, relationships, career prospects; lives. If a complaint is made, it tends to be treated as potential

² For local critiques, see Ratele (2019), Nyowe (2015), Baloyi & Ramose (2016), and Canham, Baloyi & Segalo (2021).

damage, as that which could damage the reputation of an individual or an organisation. There is often a concerted effort to stop a complaint from going through the system or to stop a complaint from getting out (2018, p. 15).

I follow these scholars by articulating a litany of black complaint against psychology. I take Ahmed's warning about complaint seriously. To be a dissident is to be marked and further peripheralised. Only, I am already in the periphery—some of it is self-imposed through my refusals and some of it is a consequence of geo and body politics.³ But this is a margin that I am walking away from. I no longer cower from the panopticon of psychology. By accepting a universal psychology through grand theories of the psyche and linear models of development, black and global south people have been written out of full existence. Through my litany of black complaint, I outline four points of objection.

Psychology is a practice that is inextricably tied to English idioms of life

We live lives in local vernaculars and understand our experiences in the contexts where we live. To be a white person who lives in Oxford in the United Kingdom or in Boston, Massachusetts in the United States is to live on a single plane of consciousness. This plane of consciousness is the local vernacular formed within domestic idioms and rhythms of white middle-class life. Since Euro-America has been imagined and deliberately conceived of as the place of enlightenment, theory and reason (Mignolo, 2009), colonial subjects elsewhere in the world have been rendered unreasonable and atheoretical. Euro-American vernaculars or knowledges have been imposed on the black colonial world. Psychology is one of these vernaculars. Beyond psychology, Chimamande Adichie Ngozi (2009) reminds us how British idioms, from the books that she read, applied pressure on her to write stories that were not located in Nigerian idioms and meaning making.

An example of black idioms of death might be found in black death rituals and cosmologies. Unlike Judo-Christian or secular understandings of death, black death vernaculars foreground the ancestral. The dead are therefore revered and understood to co-exist with the living. They give form to how we live here and, in the afterlife (Canham, 2023; Banana, 1991). We consult the dead to make meaning of existential crises. To remain in communion with the ancestral, we visit graves, conduct rituals, and appease them when we have wronged them by walking out of step with cultural dictates. We negotiate with ancestors and find equilibrium between this world and the ancestral realm. With this single example of cosmological rootedness and death vernaculars, I suggest that our idioms are out of synch with white ways of being. However, in white epistemologies and canon-building, black epistemologies are not just different, they are inferior.

³ Walter Mignolo (2009) writes geopolitics attune to the geolocation of power in the knowledge industries where those in the global north determine what counts for truth and knowledge. He reads body-politics as the calculus with which bodies are imbued with credibility to make knowledge claims.

They need remedying, disproving, enhancement, and education. Instead of entering a debate about the value of black epistemologies by insisting that we make room for them at the table of psychology, I choose to strike a different path. To walk away to a place beyond the reach of psychology. In this pathway, I walk towards attending to questions animated by why blackness and death cohabit so intimately, why do we die differently from white others, and where and why do we die?⁴ My own orientation is inflected through what Christina Sharpe (2014) terms a black studies that attends with care to blackness. Care is necessary for death work. For thinking with black life.

Given the existing premises of psychology, unlike the Maori anthropologist about which Mignolo's (2009) writes, I cannot enact geopolitics (thinking from where I am) and body-politics (theorising from my experience) of knowledge in order to place psychology at my service. This is to say, although I embrace the enactment of geopolitics and body-politics, I refuse to make space in psychology, a discipline invested in my annihilation. I refuse dialogue with Euro-American psychology which consigns African experience to the exotic and exceptional. While Ratele (2019) provides a compelling case for African psychology as a situated practice of psychology from Africa, I question the value of psychologising well entrenched practices and vernaculars that readily and competently explain African life worlds. I am weary and do not have the energy to invest in decolonising psychology. I find more productive openings in the modes of thought and practices used by black ancestors. As I will suggest, there are better ways of scripting myself and black life in general beyond the psych-complex and English vernaculars.

Psychology unsees black death

In historicising psychology, Guthrie (2004) famously wrote that “even the rat was white”. What does it mean to be written out of history both in the past and present? To be black is to live in an apocalyptic spacetime saturated in colonial, white supremacist, and neoliberal toxins. In this debris, many of us are mortally wounded. We live with over-determined dying and death. Africans die disproportionately from impoverishment, diseases like the non-ending AIDS pandemic, from the coronavirus, malaria, Ebola, and a range of preventable diseases (Canham, 2021). We have no prospects for a rapaciously greedy pharmaceutical industry. We die from disasters like earthquakes, floods, mine collapses, drownings. In 2021 alone, the United Nations (2022) reports that 3000 migrants drowned in the Mediterranean and the Northwest African maritime route to the Canary Islands while attempting to reach Europe. The rate of death in these oceans doubles year on year. According to the UNHCR, overland routes through the Sahara Desert may lead to even greater numbers of dead Africans in detention centres, remote border areas, or in the course of being held by traffickers or smugglers. Accounting for black death is a risky exercise since black dying is often invisible in fugitive zones where we enact our desires for

⁴ Rinaldo Walcott (2009) draws our attention to the value of doing this death work.

freedom. The arithmetic or mathematics of blackness is often illegible in zones of death (McKittrick, 2016). Psychology journals continue to rewrite the same material in a warped pattern of compulsive repetition. We die unseen.

Source: UNHCR Risk Mitigation Strategy and 2022 Appeal.

In Zimbabwe, conservative estimates place neonatal mortality at 32 deaths per 1000 deaths. This excludes unregistered home births that are administered by midwives (Multiple Indicator Survey, 2019).⁵ Neonatal deaths are those that occur within the first 28 days of birth. Rinaldo Walcott (2013, p. 143) contends that living in the wake of centuries of black devastation that trail the legacy of the slavery, “the question of death should be central to the analysis of black diaspora cultures”. As I suggest in my Africa focused analysis here, the gaze should be bidirectional in spotlighting death, both in Africa and in her diaspora. We too, live in the wake of slavery, its unsettlement, and its maladies of racial capitalism. Having visited several sites of slavery on the Indian Ocean and places of genocidal hauntings on the African continent, I recenter Africa within Katherine McKittrick’s (2006) conception of demonic ground, Édouard Glissant’s (1997) *Gehenna*, literally a hell of fiery torment, and what I have termed black deathscapes. To be African then, is to intimately home with death. It is to live on a deathscape (Canham, 2023).

Psychology’s frames of reference are white—kinship, nuclear family, oriented straight and middle class

Africa is everything that Europe is not—a place of negation. Chinua Achebe captured this deathly sentiment in his remarkable reading of Joseph Conrad’s *Heart of Darkness*. “Quite simply it is the desire—one might indeed say the need—in Western psychology to set Africa up as a foil to Europe, as a place of negations at once remote and vaguely familiar, in comparison with which Europe’s own state of spiritual grace will be manifest” (Achebe, 2016, p. 15). Europe’s state of grace is racialised white, it is constituted by the nuclear family as a natural formation of kinship. It is straight and queer is its aberration. Against this state of grace, Africa is underdeveloped, childlike, and a diseased queer place of excess and unruliness. It fails on every matrix of modernity and it is on the last rung of the psychological timetable. The African is not the runt of Piaget’s litter, it is closer to the animal. Just grunts and frenetic movement.⁶ Europe and the disciplines through which it makes itself can smile in self-satisfied pleasure because Africa reliably casts the shadow of darkness thereby illuminating European grace. Psychology is central to this project.

Psychology is wed to the psy-complex, and except through pathology, refuses to account for the social lives of black people. But if we walk away from

⁵ See “Workers plot stillbirth burials” <https://mg.co.za/africa/2022-08-13-zimbabwe-hospital-workers-plot-stillbirth-burials/>

⁶ Achebe’s (2016) close reading of Conrad’s *Heart of Darkness* is useful here.

psychology, we see openings. Breaks is the fold from which we might leap to a freedom where self-love is possible (Fanon, 2008). Neo S. Musangi (2018) and Savannah Shange (2019) suggest that in the search for liveable lives, black queer relation refashions and reimagines notions of kinship. In this reimagining and practice, Euro-American models of kinship are deformed. For Africans, supposedly healthy models of family and relation that have been placed beyond the reach of blackness, can in fact be zones of danger and be both unworkable and non-desirable. Those of us who live in the wake of enslavement, colonialism, and apartheid—fatal systems of racial capitalism, live lives that psychology can only apprehend as pathological and deviant. I suggest that no matter how we contort the discipline to see ourselves, through the prism of psychology, the view can only yield distortion. To apprehend ourselves in our full complexity, we may have to use black queer tools that embrace blackness as a fugitive freedom bound disposition. Our registers of apprehension should see death as close, hovering, well-worn and material.

Psychology is unrecognisable in black rural communities where modernism has mostly failed. Although indigenous knowledges are not devoid of psychological meaning making, they refuse discipline and errantly move in the service of survivance undergirded by pleasure. Black rural life is queerly aligned to urban white formations that most closely resemble psychological norms. Here, while I register sexuality, I refer more to off centre, strange and wayward forms of living that resonate with black rural existence. As a rural black queer being, I am unreadable and invisible to the psychological canon. Where I vaguely emerge, I am an illegible apparition—my contours are indecipherable in the mirage from which I never rise. Even when Frantz Fanon (2008) first saw me in the 1950s and 1960s, he had to look askance by leaning on black and Caribbean registers of recognition. This is to suggest that to see blackness, Fanon relied on an interdisciplinary method that enabled him to see past the white masks. Fanon's vernacular theorisations began with a commitment to seeing the colonised subject rather than an obligation to disciplinarity. From an Afro-Caribbean situatedness, he was able to provide his devastating account of colonisation, its effects on the colonised, and he imagined post-colonial futures drenched in neo-colonial toxins and pulsating with violence. Fanon saw black life and death not because of psychology but because he used tools of apprehension always already present in the colony and its demonic deathscapes.

Since "black death is constantly framing black peoples' everyday livability" (Walcott, 2013, p. 143), if psychology's frames of reference are oriented away from our ways of dying, how do we do our death work? Black scholarship suggests that an ethics of care is central to tending to the folds, plains and the imminence of death in black being (Macharia, 2019; Sharpe, 2016; McKittrick, 2014; Weheliye, 2014; Walcott, 2013). In the haste to diagnose and to reinscribe normative codes, I do not see the practice of care. With loss writ large in black life, there is an absencing of care work even in extant psychological frames of melancholia. Therefore, if Freudian melancholia is the inability to integrate the lost object (the many dead), black people do not easily fit into this frame since our very cultures have become oriented towards knitting our dead into our

cosmologies and meaning making.⁷ In place of melancholia, we are oriented by a free poetics that is invested in our yearning for survival. Mbembe described this as the perpetual movement of Africans towards the unknown undergirded by the need to repair and create (Goldberg, 2018). However, in our yearning, we hold our dead close and practice a mournful ethic of care—a recognition of our loss through embracing our dead. We do not move away from our dead; we move towards them in a poetics of relation that sutures worlds that become impossible to interdict. This does not make us Freud's melancholic subjects. It makes us boundless beings who thrive in contradiction.

Psychology is tethered to the nation state

In this litany of complaint, I signal the refusal of psychological associations to recognise blackness as a movement formed across nation states and therefore as un beholden to this violent register of being. Psychology's commitment to blanket universals which I read as white normativity, is contradicted by a localising instinct predicated on national boundaries. Therefore, in South Africa, we have the Psychological Association of South Africa founded as an (racially) inclusive association to work against the apartheid legacy of racial segregation and harm caused by white psychology which is also supremacy. Although this organisation is purportedly inclusive, its very existence is premised on South Africanness—a parochial identity subtended by apartheid, colonial and neo-colonial logics of nationalism that unsee black movement. Here black movement points to the constant reinvention that comes with fugitivity, opacity as a collective yearning for expression, and blackness as pan-African and diasporic (Harney & Moten, 2013; Walcott, 2013; Glissant, 1997). Conceived of this way, blackness is uncontainable in nationally oriented conceptions of being that are tethered to the psy-complex. Through its network of regulation, the psy-complex demands coherence, stasis, and pathology. It does not make space for nomadic dreamscapes of blackness.

Even as migrancy may be a concern for psychology, a national psychology is limited by an inability to witness black movement across the region and continent. Movement as legitimate, as life giving, as a tenet of black freedom. Psychology turns away from how Zimbabweans die in transit because of the precarity of narrowly proscribed citizenship. How xenophobia and colonial gatekeeping kills black people and works against our quest for movement, for freedom. How African borders have become zones of black death. Psychology is therefore unable to bring the Mediterranean crossings—empire's insistence on black death and its interdicting of black movement—into its registers of comprehension. Walcott (2013, p. 149) advises that fidelity to tracking black movement enables us to attune to “the ways in which the conditions of black death seem to repeat across space, time, and location”. In walking away from psychology, I aspire to tracking the way black people occupy and move in space, how we dunk and dance, pause and weave, die, and grasp for pleasure in death

⁷ Readers are referred to Freud's (1917) writings on melancholia.

defying ways—if only to defer violent annihilation for a more satisfactory death. Following Édouard Glissant's (1997) theorisation of movement, my interest in black motion is at the level of both physical movement and motion at the level of ideas untethered from the stasis of psychological registers.

Black errantry and freedom bound movements

To choose freedom is also to refuse consignment to the wasteland of psychology and its litany of psychopathology. It is to strike and perhaps to riot by moving away from non-being towards a space of creativity resembling freedom. In her seminal essay, *The race for theory*, Barbara Christian (1987) wrote about her move from philosophy to literature as a passage to possibility. She observes that literature “seemed to have the possibilities of rendering the world as large and as complicated as I experienced it, as sensual as I knew it was. In literature I sensed the possibility of the integration of feeling/knowledge, rather than the split between the abstract and the emotional in which Western philosophy inevitably indulged” (1987, p. 56). To move from one place to another and from discipline to freedom is a political leap. I too seek to move to the prospect of feeling where black being is rendered with complexity and possibility rather than stasis characterised by capture, confinement, and encampment. What would it mean for me to spend time not thinking about my deficiencies in the mirror of psychology? What would a focus on tracking black death and creativity look like? A caring and tending to that embraces movement? For this reason, I turn to black errantry, a feature that is embraced by black studies.

Glissant (1997) pointed to the problems of rootedness or what he termed the totalitarian root. I conceive of psychology this way—attached and stuck to its origins, monolingual and refusing fluency in other tongues, and therefore unable to move and imagine all of us in its ambit of theorisation. Glissant favoured relation and errantry to rootedness. Following Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari, he replaced rootedness with the idea of the rhizome, “an enmeshed root system, a network spreading either in the ground or in the air, with no predatory rootstock taking over permanently” thus challenging ideas of a totalitarian root (1997, p. 11). Errantry therefore moves against the root and invokes temptation, curiosity, and openness about the Other. Glissant termed this the poetics of relation where all identities are “extended through a relationship with the Other” (1997, p. 11). Conceived of this way, shared ground and knowledges are central to relation. In relation to errantry, Betsy Wing, Glissant's translator observed: “Directed by Relation, errantry follows neither an arrowlike trajectory nor one that is circular and repetitive, nor is it mere wandering-idle roaming. Wandering, one might become lost, but in errantry one knows at every moment where one is—at every moment in relation to the other” (Glissant, 1997, p. xvi). By forsaking origin stories where worth is determined by root, a poetics of relation deforms hierarchies of being and value. Blackness is not understood in oppositional terms—the foil of whiteness—and as deficit. It is engaged in self-conscious errantry in search of relation.

It is now apparent that I am accusing psychology of being a totalitarian root. In its place, I am invoking walking away as a form of errantry. For Christian (1987), literature was the rhizomatic place that she reached after walking away from the strictures of philosophy. For me, it is black studies, literature, African queer studies and a range of locations that defy a single root. My political commitments are towards theoretical and conceptual tools that allow me to imagine blackness into being. My rhizomatic wanderings find space in the air, in the earth, atop hills, underwater and narrow spaces on surfaces and in folds. All these movements are my desire to go against the root that insists in my interdiction. In walking away, I engage in Glissantian dialectics of rerouting and invest in freedom that honours my location and those with whom I live in relation. I insist in a multiple relationship with the Other—the black queers, women, working classes, rural elderly people, possessed adolescents, the excess bodies of the city, those battling climate disaster in the Caribbeans rising oceans and Haitians fight to live on hostile ground. I seek relation with those drowning in the Mediterranean and those navigating Beitbridge and other borderlands of black annihilation. My desire is to participate in a relation of repair and care that eludes the disciplines of generalising universals. To find care in spaces outside of psychology points to a discipline bereft of care despite its ironic aim of healing.

To walk away from psychology is not to renounce it. It is already imprinted in my thinking, and it forms part of my identity. Glissant is useful once more. He observes that errantry “is not a resolute act of rejection or an uncontrolled impulse of abandonment” (1997, p. 18). He contends that instead, identity is no longer to be found completely within the root but also in relation. Consequently, the ways of thinking to which I move (e.g. black studies, queer African studies etc.) are not devoid of psychology. I hold knowledge relative to all these ways of comprehending. In relation. A position of errantry does not ask what would psychology have to do to see black death and life differently? It relies on multiple ways of seeing that are untethered from the root. If relation is spoken in the poetics of the multilingual, beyond disciplinary boundaries, errantry is to be untethered from the territory of nation state where imagination ends at the borders of the state. It is to be unmoored from the fallacy of South African superiority in relation to her neighbours. It is to call out its myths of exceptionalism. Errantry therefore follows a different rhythm to that of national associations such as the American Psychological Association or the South African Psychological Association. It sees the fate of Zimbabweans and Mozambicans as inextricable from South Africans. It problematises belonging as stasis. It sees our mutual ways of dying and it invests in our creative wanderings in search of black freedom. Its conceptual lens is a form of relation that enlarges instead of territorialising. To consolidate around the nation is to move to monolingual intent and to be immobile—to arrest black mobility. I say this with an awareness of the seminal role of mid-twentieth century nationalist indigenous movements seeking to depose colonial governments and parasitic settler populations.⁸ In the post colony, nationalism has however outlived its usefulness

⁸ Edward Said (2012) and C.L.R. James (2012) are important examples of scholars who advanced nationalism for decolonial struggles in the majority world yoked by colonialism.

and morphed into uncaring boundary maintenance against black Others. It has modelled itself on white modes of statehood.

The internal exile of self-satisfied containment and grids of intelligibility to which psychology has consigned itself mutes it to the thrill of mobility. The mobility to which Glissant refers does not seek to conquer and discover—to pursue an ontological obsession of knowledge—but to foster relation. The alternative to the pleasure of movement is the torment of internal exile that forecloses errantry's imaginary vision. I posit that black creativity thrives in spaces that attend to both repair and imagination. When we do not look for pathology, creative practices of survival are loosed. Even at the risk of breaking the flow of the argument I am advancing, now would be a good time to briefly pause to an illustrative aside. In teaching a critical variant of community psychology, I taught students to read the ways that psychology flattened black working-class people while I also advocated for them to recognise and work with how these communities engaged in creative practices of survival. However, to undo the contradictions that are central to critical community psychology, over time, my colleagues began to agitate for psychological coherence. This coherence is the lifeblood of the psy-complex. This meant that psychotherapeutic and psychopathological concepts had to permeate my teaching practice. Coherence meant that the creative impulse of survival was replaced by domesticating concepts such as depression and attachment in community. This is not the only reason for walking away from psychology, but it is an important consideration. My commitment is towards the creative impulse of black survival, its structures, and economies of desire and how it remakes amid black death. Errantry and relation. I could have stayed at the periphery of the department of psychology and bark at its margins as I have for so long. But one can be a shadowy figure who shrivels in the dark or one might leap out of psychology and break from its sprawling psy-complex. I choose sunlight.

Expanding on the creative impulse to survive, Achille Mbembe contends that intrinsic “to ‘the human’ is something that can never be turned into an object, something ineradicable, and is the desire to be free” (Goldberg, 2018, p. 212). This is the nub of what Walcott (2021) theorises as uninterdictable—audacious eruptions of blackness that exceed limits. It is the thing that racial capitalism cannot break. Since blackness is always mobile and able to occupy multiplicity, its boundlessness allows it to create pleasure amid attempts to capture and restrain it. In walking away from psychology through the studied practice of errantry, I signal my commitment to pleasure, to tracing black multiplicity and its shifting habits and habitations, and to tending to its escape and recreation. To tend to black death and life this way is to surface survivance—survival and endurance that resists nihility and victimry and go beyond reaction (Vizenor, 2008). In McKittrick's (2006) terms, when we see black death, this requires us to ask what else happened here? Therefore, away from the pathologising lenses of psychology, in my new relational and caring theorisation driven by a feminist ethics of care, my desire is to be propelled by this question. What else happened?

Black dance is what else happened amidst death

The question of what else happened rubs against the diagnostic manual's predetermined parameters. It is underpinned by curiosity. Here, curiosity is at once simple and underpinned by political investments against lazy tropes. It is open to surprise and regeneration. A looking ahead that is cognisant of the past but leaps out of its limited parameters. It sees and tends to death but also explores what else occurred at the site of dying. McKittrick (2006) asked this question in relation to the *Zong* slave ship. She was imploring those who study slavery to expand their enquiry to consider the complexity of black livingness even in black vales of dying and abjection. By turning to black dance in this final part of this paper, I heed this important call to attend to how we survive the hold of racial capitalism.⁹

In Africa and her diasporas, black dance is a constant occurrence. It is a form of celebration at festive events like weddings, birthdays, anniversaries, soccer games, cultural events and rituals. It is our motion of mourning when we rhythmically circle the grave during funerals and unveilings. We dance towards death when we protest inequality, oppressive work conditions and state violence. Globally, social media has exploded with black dance. Everywhere we look, black dance is an everyday occurrence. Train surfers dance atop moving trains in a dizzying dance of death.¹⁰ They seek of pleasure at the edges of death. I read black dance as an explosion of freedom. An insistence on motion in confined spaces. Among others, Robin Kelley (2022) and Danielle Goldman (2010) have illustrated how black dance carries black freedom dreams. Black dance captures Glissant's ideas of black errantry as a freedom bound movement. Its occurrence across space is an apt illustration of attending to "what else happened"?

To the non-black observer, black dance is a contradiction since modernity reads dance as a performance of exuberance and joy. To this observer, black dance is not only surprising but inexplicable when it occurs in spaces of abjection. However, if we attend to the long emancipation—an endless push against unending oppression, we know that blackness is necessarily attentive to struggle, death, mourning, joy, survival, and livingness. Any scholarship that unsees this complexity fails blackness. To charge psychology as failing black people is therefore to suggest that it is unable to hold our movement and complexity. The stasis of its diagnostic manuals and foundational theories hobbles the discipline and blinds it to seeing what else happened. My antidote to this failure is errantry—movement towards registers of seeing black motion. Sometimes this requires a location in black studies, queer African genres of attending, cultural studies, and literature. This is not a commitment to discipline or even interdisciplinary but a pledge to attending blackness in its multiplicity. I am not suggesting that this should be everyone's mantle. As a black person who has long been rendered invisible and as pathology when I do show up in the

⁹ Christina Sharpe (2016) theorised the hold of the slave ship.

¹⁰ See this short film on train surfing in Soweto, South Africa: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vAwprnQZJcw>

discipline I was trained in, it is my responsibility to bring black death and life into view. I want to do this in ways that do not capture blackness and render it transparent. As Glissant (1997) cautioned, opacity is an essential attribute of survival. The confounding nature of black dance is illustrative of this insistent move against capture. In walking away, I attend to bursts of freedom which are also a mournful tending to our dead and the deathscapes on which we live.

Conclusion

After years of grappling to see myself and those like me, I write this paper as my breakup with psychology. I have argued for how we might apprehend the black failure of psychology by pointing to the ways in which it refuses to see blackness beyond deficit. But the paper has gone beyond lament and pointed to the productivity of the register of complaint by outlining four black failures of psychology: Psychology is a practice that is inextricably tied to English idioms of life; psychology unsees black death; psychology's frames of reference are white—kinship, nuclear family, oriented straight and middle class; and psychology is tethered to the nation state. In place of psychology, I have proposed a way of attending through Glissant's concepts of errantry and relation. By tending to black motion and our yearnings for freedom, errantry and relation offer us a way out of psychological stasis. Errantry and relation are attentive to death and freedom dreams. This is a crucial antidote to the pervasive unseeingness of psychology. In walking away, I do not seek new disciplinary strictures. I do however find a holding space in between ways of thinking that attend to blackness. These thinking spaces do not demand allegiance. Since my role is to attend to blackness, I cannot commit to inertia when blackness shows up as movement and dance in narrow spaces. To read black death, livingness and survivance, McKittrick insists that I must always be ready to ask what else happened at the sight of death. This is my political commitment against black annihilation.

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