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THE DEVELOPMENT OF CRITICAL PSYCHOLOGY AND ITS CONTRIBUTION TO SOCIAL CHANGE IN SLOVENIA

Abstract

In this paper, I discuss the development of critical psychological theory and practice and its contribution to social change in Slovenia. I outline the development of critical psychology in Slovenia during the period of the Socialist Republic of Yugoslavia and its transformation during the transition period following the formation of the state of Slovenia and the shift towards neoliberal economy. Critical psychology emerged in Slovenia during the student movements of the late 1960s and early 1970s. Critical reflection on psychology was expressed primarily by critical psychology students and, to a much lesser extent, by academic and professional psychologists. Influenced by the socially critical authors of the Frankfurt School, critical psychoanalysis, French structuralism, and feminist theory and practice, students began to critically question the position of psychology in Slovenia at that time. In Slovenia and across the whole of Yugoslavia, the feminist movement played a significant role in critical thought, as well as in the formation of critical psychology. The feminist slogan 'The personal is political' alone stimulated a flourishing of psychological imagination in this field. Unquestioned privacy thus became visible, problematic, and worthy of scientific examination. Alongside social movements and critical theoretical reflection, critical psychologists in Slovenia in the 1970s and 1980s also subjected counselling and therapeutic practices, as well as total institutions, to reflection and practical intervention. Common to all alternative therapeutic practices stemming from critical psychological theoretical concepts was the idea of deinstitutionalisation. During the transition and post-transition periods, critical psychologists in Slovenia turned, rather than to the development of explicit critical theories of psychology, to practical criticism of the existing order and to research in areas most exposed to the destructive effects of the illiberal transformation of society. Today, however, the task of critical psychology is primarily emancipatory: to contribute, both theoretically and empirically, to raising awareness of processes in which people lose their human dignity and replace this loss with commercial and digital artefacts, and to re-empowering people to preserve humanity, mutual respect and community action.

Keywords

crisis in psychology, student movements, feminist critique of psychology, anti-psychiatry movement, emancipatory role of psychology

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Introduction

In this paper, I discuss the development of critical psychological theory and practice and its contribution to social change in Slovenia. I analyse the reasons for the emergence of critical psychology, which, in my view, are twofold. The broader political reasons stem from the change in the social climate in the early 1970s in Slovenia and Yugoslavia. In a narrower academic sense, dissatisfaction arose, particularly among politically engaged psychology students, with the narrow, experimentally and behaviourally oriented academic psychology that failed to respond to social problems and needs.

In the brief history of psychology as a science, there have been a succession of periods of crisis and questioning of the fundamental theoretical models of psychology. In certain social periods, these models prioritised scientific objectivism modelled on the natural sciences – for example, behaviourist, empiricist and functionalist models. In other periods, however, they followed the demand for social relevance and social activism – for example, humanistic-hermeneutic and socially critical models. These periods of crisis in psychology are linked to broader social developments and largely coincide with the intensification of social crises and the need for social change.

Although talk of a crisis in psychology has been a recurring theme throughout the brief history of the discipline, it seems that it was primarily the debates on the crisis in psychology during the 1970s and 1980s that offered the possibility of a paradigm shift in psychology. Drawing on the highly influential critical theory of society, various branches of critical psychology developed, which rejected conventional models of psychology and sought to transcend them through socially critical psychology. These debates called into question the previously dominant individualistic and positivist paradigm of psychology. The critical approach thus advocated a shift in the role of psychologists from neutral observers of psychological phenomena to socially situated subjects within the research process (Holzkamp, 1972; Gergen, 1973; Llewelyn & Kelly, 1980; Sampson, 1983).

In fact, the significance of critical psychology does not lie in its offering a fully-formed alternative vision of psychology, but rather in its providing us with a broader social, epistemological, methodological and practical framework than that afforded by the dominant models of psychology. The value and significance of critical psychology lies in its drawing our attention to alienated social subsystems that seek to rise above society and act as its representatives, and which subordinate all social processes to particular interests. Critical psychology thus enables psychology to achieve greater social relevance and a higher level of reflection on its own theoretical assumptions.

The beginnings of critical psychology in Slovenia

The establishment of psychology studies and academic development in Slovenia and throughout Yugoslavia after the Second World War was severely restricted for a long time, both due to the poor economic conditions in post-war Yugoslavia and the shortage of academically trained psychologists capable of teaching psychology at university level. Furthermore, in the post-war period in Yugoslavia, the humanities were subject to the pressures of ideological dogmatism imposed by the then single-party regime on all social sciences and humanities. Psychology, in particular, faced accusations of being a ‘bourgeois’ and ‘middle-class’ discipline, deemed unnecessary for a socialist and proletarian state.

Indeed, the development of Yugoslavia in the post-war period was strongly influenced by the conflict that escalated in 1948 between the Yugoslav leadership (Tito) and the Soviet leadership of the time (Stalin). Among other things, this conflict required the Yugoslav state leadership to develop its own innovative form of socialist democracy, which would serve as an alternative to both the Soviet model of real socialism and Western models of the welfare state. In Yugoslavia, the role of such political innovation was assumed by the system of social self-management. This system was conceived as a system of direct democracy with workers' management of enterprises and citizens' management of the local social environment. At least, that is how political propaganda portrayed it, thereby strengthening unity and concealing internal tensions and conflicts. This was also aided by the charismatic role of President Tito in foreign policy, who became the leading protagonist of the policy of non-alignment, around which the majority of the so-called Third World countries rallied.

Psychology as a science thus had to fight for recognition both as a scientific and academic discipline independent of other sciences and philosophy on the one hand, and as a politically and ideologically neutral science on the other. For this reason, when the study of psychology was first established at the University of Ljubljana, the founders defined psychology as a natural science and developed it as an experimental science modelled on the natural sciences. The first Department of Psychology in Slovenia was established in 1950 at the Faculty of Arts of the University of Ljubljana. The establishment of the department was decisively influenced by Mihajlo Rostohar, who had obtained his doctorate in philosophy in Vienna. Before the Second World War, Rostohar had been engaged in research and teaching at the University of Prague, where in 1925 he established the first independent Department of Psychology and a psychological laboratory for experimental psychology in Czechoslovakia. When the Department of Psychology was established at the University of Ljubljana, Rostohar became its first head. As he had already retired by 1959, he did not have a significant influence on the development of scientific psychology in Slovenia.

In the early years, the development of the Department of Psychology at the University of Ljubljana was most influenced by the Croatian professors Ramiro Bujas and his son Zoran Bujas. Ramiro Bujas is regarded as the founder of scientific psychology in Yugoslavia. Before the First World War, he studied philology, literature and psychology in Graz. In Zagreb, he established the first laboratory for experimental psychology as early as 1920 and founded the journal *Acta Instituti Psychologici Unversitatis Zagrabiensis*, which is still published today. His experimental work focused on the psychophysiology of the senses and problems of thought. Above all, he is known for developing statistical methodology for psychologists. His son, Zoran Bujas, also worked on statistical methodology in psychology and had a significant influence on the development of experimental academic psychology supported by quantitative methods in Ljubljana and Zagreb.

Academic psychology in Slovenia was therefore distinctly empiricist in orientation during the first decades following the establishment of the Department of Psychology. In the early days of academic psychology, the behaviourist paradigm of psychology seemed the most scientifically promising, modelled on the established natural sciences, and suitable for establishing psychology as a science. At the same time, it also appeared to be the most value-neutral, free from potential ideological interpretations, which was desirable at a time when politics in Yugoslavia was attempting to control science as well. This hindered the development of all other branches of psychology, particularly the development of critically reflective approaches.

However, in the late 1960s and 1970s, discussions about the crisis in psychology and critiques of academic psychology also emerged among some psychology students in Slovenia. These debates were part of a specific socio-cultural climate triggered at that time by the student movements in Yugoslavia. The emergence of student movements in university centres in Slovenia and other republics of Yugoslavia in the late 1960s and early 1970s was closely linked to the period of crisis in socialist Yugoslavia at the time. Unfortunately, Yugoslavia was unable to transform the ideas of self-management and non-alignment into developmental capital due to poor economic policy. Furthermore, tensions between the republics persisted throughout, escalating in the 1960s primarily due to the conflict between the libertarian interests of some republics and the authoritarian and nationalist interests of other republics within the common state of Yugoslavia.

The socio-cultural climate and historical circumstances are always intertwined. They were particularly intertwined during the student movements. The student movements, which swept across a significant part of the world in the late 1960s, were not political movements in the traditional sense of the word. They had no clear political objectives, were not tied to any political party, and were not led by established organisations of political activists. Rather, they were political in that they brought numerous components and tendencies of a libertarian civil society into the public consciousness. In the 1960s, a more open social climate began to develop, particularly in Slovenia. It was a time of so-called economic and political liberalisation. During this period, there was a significant increase in the number of students continuing their studies at tertiary level, greater mobility among young people, and an opening up to the European and global arena. Students began to question developments in the wider social sphere, as well as within the narrower academic environment. Students in Slovenia and other university centres across Yugoslavia demanded greater criticality towards political and academic regimes, greater openness, and the liberalisation of public and academic discourse.

At the forefront of the student movement in Slovenia, Yugoslavia and the world were human rights, social justice, solidarity with oppressed and marginalised social groups and nations, pacifism, resistance to consumerism and the raising of ecological issues. In this context, protesting students acted not only as promoters of democratic change, but also as bearers and promoters of critical reflection in general, particularly in the social sciences, including psychology. Nor is it a coincidence that critical reflection on psychology was cultivated and expressed primarily by critical psychology students and to a much lesser extent by academic and professional psychologists. Thus, within the framework of the Pedagogical Institute in Ljubljana in the 1980s, we organised a series of symposia at which we addressed certain key psychological concepts. At a symposium entitled ‘The Well-Rounded Personality’ in 1985, we critically examined the concept of so-called 'well-rounded personality', upon which the socialist pedagogy of the time was based. Precisely because this concept appears self-evident and unquestionable, whilst at the same time being conceptually undifferentiated and unclear, it carries within it the seeds of ideologisation, leading to pragmatic interpretations dependent on current political interests.[1]

It was precisely the theoretical discussion sparked by the papers from the symposium on the a well-rounded personality that led to the formation of a civil society movement for the analysis of the school sector, which continued with the systematic and critical monitoring of state measures within the education system. This movement resulted in two further high-profile symposia: a symposium

[1] The papers from the symposium were published in a special issue of the journal *Problemi* (4, 1985)

entitled 'The Relationship between Upbringing and Education'[2] and a symposium entitled 'The Theory of Upbringing: Modern or Postmodern?[3]

Student movements in Yugoslavia were surprisingly widespread and resonated strongly with the public. They were quickly joined by other civil society movements: feminist, anti-psychiatric, peace, ecological. These movements were not a random or externally imported phenomenon in the then-socialist Yugoslavia, but rather stemmed from internal contradictions and conflicts triggered by attempts to partially open up society during the so-called economic and political liberalisation of the 1960s. These contradictions fostered the emergence and spread of social criticism and innovative initiatives, which also found an echo in certain more autonomous and critically oriented social science media, for example in the journals *Praxis* (Zagreb), *Perspektive* (Ljubljana) and *Sociologija* (Belgrade). The driving forces behind these initiatives were critically and Marxist-oriented intellectuals (philosophers, sociologists, writers) who also gained international recognition. Of particular importance and international renown were the summer meetings of philosophers on the island of Korčula – the so-called Korčula School of Philosophy – and the international social science conferences in Dubrovnik at the so-called Dubrovnik International Centre.

One of the reasons for the critical re-examination of the structures of authority in the 1970s and 1980s was also a crisis of sorts within universities, or rather within the structures of knowledge produced by them. Universities at that time generally followed the Humboldtian model, which no longer met the demands of the times, as it sought to cultivate a self-contained and uninventive form of knowledge that was no longer in touch with the rapid developments in society and science at the time. This also applied to Slovenian universities. As individual critically-minded psychology students who had come into contact with the then-dominant European critical theoretical traditions, sought to transcend the empiricist and descriptive horizons of the study of psychology and redirect it towards achieving practical and emancipatory relevance (Ule, 1982; Bahovec, 1983; Miheljak, 1983; Ule, 1986). We found support among students of other humanities disciplines, particularly philosophy and sociology.

Under the influence of the socially critical authors of the Frankfurt School—with their then highly engaged theorists of contemporary society, such as Adorno, Horkheimer, Marcuse, Habermas, as well as French structuralism with its renowned authors such as Foucault and Althusser, we began to critically re-examine the position of psychology in Slovenia at that time. Adorno's essay on the relationship between psychology and sociology was an extremely important text for the development of critical psychology at that time. The translation was published in the journal Problemi (Adorno, 1976). In it, Adorno analysed the tension between the macro (sociological) and micro (psychological) levels of social analysis. He emphasised that these were not separate fields, but rather a dialectical interweaving of social structures and the individual psyche. His key demand was that sociology must retain its critical power, yet it must be able to recognise psychological mechanisms without reducing complex social phenomena to them.

[2] The papers from the symposium The Difference between Upbringing and Education were published in a special issue of Problemi-Šolsko polje (11, 1988)

[3] Papers from the symposium 'The Theory of Upbringing and Education' were published in the newly established journal Šolsko polje (3, 1990)

It was precisely the theoretical output of Europe at that time that served as an important point of reference for the student movement as well. Slovenian critical psychologists became acquainted with critical currents in psychology primarily through further study abroad, particularly in Germany and France. In the 1980s, I attended further training courses in Munich and Berlin. There I met some important representatives of critical psychology and became acquainted with their work, for example Wolfgang Mertens and Heinrich Keupp from LMU Munich, and Klaus Holzkamp from FU Berlin. It was then that I realised first-hand that critical psychology can intervene argumentatively both in the fabric of mainstream psychology and in the fabric of the society in which psychology takes place.

Klaus Holzkamp was significant for the development of critical psychology at that time; he sought to develop a general, Marxist-based anthropological-historical foundation for the reconceptualisation of the whole of psychology and psychological practice. Holzkamp's fundamental thesis was that psychology should investigate the processes of the individual's active engagement with the material world and the processes of appropriation, that is, the development of mental and physical capacities for human agency in the material world (Holzkamp, 1972). I also familiarised myself with other strands of critical psychology in the Germany at the time, such as Lorenzer's 'critical theory of the subject', which investigated the processes of the formation and internalisation of unconscious 'forms of interaction' (Lorenzer, 1977) and Habermas's interactionist theory of socialisation and communication (Habermas, 1981).

At psychology congresses in Yugoslavia or at other formal psychology conferences, we also came into contact with some critically-minded students and assistants at academic centres in other republics of Yugoslavia. At the University of Belgrade, there were a few libertarian-minded colleagues who were also socially and politically engaged, for example Žarko Korač and Bora Kuzmanović. In the first decade of the twenty-first century, Žarko Korač served in the government of Zoran Đinđić, which was the only democratic and libertarian government in Serbia following the break-up of Yugoslavia. Following the assassination of Đinđić, Žarko Korač even temporarily took over the leadership of the government. Bora Kuzmanovič continued the work of Nikola Rot, the pioneer of social psychology in Belgrade.

It is interesting to note that critical psychologists from Slovenia, involved in student and other social movements—such as feminist, peace, anti-psychiatry, who went on to pursue careers in academia, were neither accepted nor welcome at the Department of Psychology of the Faculty of Arts at the University of Ljubljana at that time. We developed our critical research work at other academic institutions, for example at the Faculty of Social Sciences, the Faculty of Social Work, the Institute of Criminology, etc. However, we did network with one another and collaborate on joint projects and initiatives.

The private is political

In Slovenia and throughout Yugoslavia, the feminist movement played a significant role in critical thought, as well as in the development of critical psychology. The feminist movement, which emerged in the 1970s as the latest in a series of new civil society movements, was also an immanent critique of the idea of emancipation as understood by other social movements. It should be emphasised here that student movements did not address the issue of patriarchal ideology and gender discrimination. We women had to highlight this ourselves through our own movement when we

realised that we had been overlooked, even though we had actively participated in other movements, subcultures and uprisings.[4] However, we had become so empowered within these movements that we were able to unite and challenge patriarchal ideology and the issue of gender discrimination ourselves.

We drew on the experience of socialism. Yugoslav socialism sought to actively overcome national and other social divisions through the idea of brotherhood and unity, and class divisions through the socialisation of private property and the development of a system of self-management. However, it did not address patriarchal relations, which were strongly present in all traditions and cultures of Yugoslavia at the time and which perpetuated the subordination of women in the private and public spheres (Mežnarič and Ule, 1993). Women were present in public life primarily in non-political activities, in the sphere of work. This was also reflected in public opinion surveys on the division of labour within the family in the 1970s (Ferligoj et al., 1979)

The feminist movement in Slovenia and Yugoslavia at that time was characterised by a close connection between personal experiences, activist work and theoretical activity. It was precisely some female psychology students at the University of Ljubljana, members of the feminist movement, who initiated critical debate and discussions on the emancipatory role of psychology through the thematisation of gender in society and psychology. We followed the critical feminist studies of prominent female psychologists from the academic sphere around the world. Of particular importance was the monograph **In a Different Voice** by Carol Gilligan, then an assistant to Harvard professor James Kohlberg, in which she analyses the gender bias of his classic theory of moral development (Gilligan, 1982). We also found the works of critical feminist psychologists such as Sue Wilkinson, Celia Kitzinger, Erica Burman and Rhode Unger to be significant. We established a network of feminist psychologists and sociologists from academic circles in Yugoslavia and met at round-table discussions and debates in Belgrade, Zagreb and Ljubljana, publishing critical sociological and psychological essays in academic journals[5] . In Belgrade, a key collaborator was Lepa Mladenovič, who since the 1990s has been actively engaged in research and counselling for women coping with trauma resulting from sexual violence, including rape, during the war in the Balkans in the 1990s[6] .

The fundamental problem for the establishment of feminist criticism of psychology was the rejection of its professional legitimacy and scientific status by the leading figures in academic psychology at the time. The main argument against the scientific and professional establishment of a feminist perspective in psychology was that it was unscientific and ideologically biased, and that feminist studies were predominantly intuitive rather than rational and discursive in nature. Consequently, feminist and other forms of critique of mainstream academic psychology failed to gain

[4] More on this in the thematic issue of the academic journal Žena (a journal on social and cultural issues concerning the place and role of women in the family and society, published by the feminist section in Zagreb), 1980, 38, 4–5.

[5] In the collection Knjižnica revolucionarne teorije (Library of Revolutionary Theory), published by the then Union of Socialist Youth of Slovenia, an anthology was published entitled: O ženski in ženskem gibanju (On Women and the Women's Movement) (1985, 26)
We published several thematic issues of Problems on feminist topics; e.g. 'The Women's Question as an Outcast'; Marxism, Feminism and Class Struggle, 1986

[6] In 2024, Lepa Mladenovič published a monograph entitled *A Feminist Approach to the Neurobiology of Rape Trauma (Mladenovič 2024)*.

a foothold at university level and did not resonate as widely in the public sphere as we had anticipated.

The feminist movement in Slovenia played an important role in the 1990s, during the period of Slovenia's independence and the adoption of the new constitution. The right to abortion was the 'litmus test' of the new political situation. Although we had already secured the constitutional right to abortion in Yugoslavia by the mid-1970s, opponents of abortion sought to remove this right from the new constitution. It was precisely through the joint action of all civil society movements that we succeeded in retaining this right in the new constitution (Bahovec, 1991).

Despite all the obstacles, the feminist perspective has introduced significant theoretical innovations into psychology; for example, the thematisation of the private/public dichotomy – the dualism upon which the unequal position of women in society rests – and the concept of sexism as a key tool in the analysis of gender role ideology, as well as the affirmation of gender as a social category and as an empirical problem (Rener & Ule, 1998). The feminist slogan *'The personal is political'* alone has stimulated a flourishing of psychological imagination in this field. Unproblematised privacy has thus become visible, problematic, and worthy of scientific examination. Moreover, in recent decades, it is precisely phenomena such as the everyday world, privacy and related sub-themes—such as family, relationships, the body, health, dietary practices, lifestyles and individualisation—that have become the most attractive topics in psychology and other social sciences (Ule et al., 2018).

On the relationship between the individual and the social

In 1983, at the Conference of Slovenian Psychologists, critical psychologists organised for the first time a section entitled *'Critique of Academic* Psychology', where we discussed positivism in (psychological) science and the relationship between the individual and the social in conceptions of the psychological subject (Gregorač, 1983). We rejected the rigid division of fields between psychology and sociology and other social sciences. The division of labour and fields between these disciplines serves as a justification for the prevailing individualistic and positivist psychological conceptualisations of the subject, personality and self, which reduce the social to the interpersonal. Sociology and other social sciences, however, are left to analyse the contexts in which these interpersonal relationships are constituted (Miheljak, 1984; Ule, 1984; Bahovec, 1984). At the same time, however, because of this division, they overlook or sidestep a question that is one of the key issues of critical approaches: how to conceptualise the psychological as fundamentally social. Precisely this implicit assumption that the social and the individual/psychological can be treated separately and simply added together is one of the central targets of the criticism that critical strands in psychology, from German critical psychology onwards, have directed at conventional psychological conceptualisations. This assumption is also one of the key obstacles preventing reflection on the political and ideological backgrounds of psychological concepts and their effects (Mencin & Ule, 2013).

Alongside social movements and critical theoretical reflection, we critically oriented psychologists in Slovenia in the 1970s and 1980s also subjected counselling and therapeutic practices, as well as total institutions, to reflection and practical intervention. Common to all alternative therapeutic practices stemming from critical psychological theoretical concepts was the idea of

deinstitutionalisation. This idea was not understood merely as an attempt to close total institutions. Above all, it was about replacing total institutions with responses to people's distress that could be created where people actually live – in the community. It involved a shift in the very epistemology of understanding distress, support and recovery, a move from pathologisation towards the normalisation of the exceptional. It was an attempt to transform the relationships between professionals and service users, shifting power towards the service user. (Flaker et al., 2008).

Deinstitutionalisation in Slovenia was initiated by a group of researchers, mainly psychologists from the Institute of Criminology at the Faculty of Law, University of Ljubljana, through their work at the reformatory for young boys in Logatec, where a unique project known as the 'Logatec Experiment' took place between 1967 and 1971. The aim of this project, which was based on the principles of anti-authoritarian education, was to change the educational paradigm within what was otherwise a distinctly authoritarian institution (Dekleva et al., 1982). Alongside innovations in practice, new methodologies in social-psychological research were developed, such as the action experiment, and new theoretical traditions were introduced, such as Lewin's field theory and the group dynamic therapy based on it (Mencin & Ule, 2013).

One of the significant developments associated with the work of critical psychologists in Slovenia was undoubtedly the anti-psychiatry movement, which took shape in Slovenia in the late 1970s and early 1980s on both an intellectual and practical level. The movement was based on the thesis that mental illness is also a product of the interaction between the individual and society. Therefore, society's response to mental illness should be one of acceptance and inclusion, not stigma. Consequently, one of the key demands of the anti-psychiatry movement was to restore dignity to patients. Theoretically, the movement's protagonists drew on Goffman's theory of stigmatised identity and his analysis of total institutions, as well as Foucault's analysis of disciplinary societies. The movement's main event was the founding of the 'Society for Assistance in Mental Distress'. It was established by the critically minded psychiatrist Ana Rojnik and the psychologist Tanja Lamovec, together with some patients. The establishment of the "Club for the Prevention of Drug Addiction" can also be counted among these social-psychiatric experiments. The aim was to provide a space for experimentation for young people who were enthusiastic about alternative ideologies and lifestyles. Thus, the club organised various evenings and workshops that introduced us to new forms of humanistic psychotherapy, experimental theatre—as well as yoga, macrobiotics and massage. A community of young people was formed, creating an important space for free experimentation.

The key figures in these developments began to connect within the Yugoslav region through a network of alternatives to psychiatry. A significant event for the group was the conference 'Psychiatry and Society' in Belgrade, organised by the aforementioned Belgrade-based critical psychologist Lepa Mladenović. A group of critical psychologists from Slovenia also attended: Gabi Čačinovič, Ana Rojnik and Vito Flaker, where they met David Cooper, Felix Guattari and others. David Cooper, in particular, was very interested in the Slovenian community experiences and even agreed to come to the next camp. Unfortunately, he passed away in the meantime.

In 1988, a group of young alternative psychologists and psychiatrists led by Vito Flaker founded the 'Committee for the Social Protection of Madness', which still operates today under the name 'Altra – Committee for Innovation in Mental Health'. The Committee for the Social Protection of Madness operated as a new social movement and focused its activities on criticising total

institutions in general and the practice of confinement and repression in the field of mental health in particular. The Committee for the Social Protection of Madness became a gathering place not only for volunteers and young professionals, but also for service users who came seeking protection when they needed an advocate. The Committee's practical work focused on counselling, advocacy and voluntary work at camps. However, one could say that the Committee's most important activity was destigmatisation, raising public awareness, and increasing sensitivity to this field.

The Committee for the Protection of Madness was the initiator and driving force behind a series of initiatives and projects, the common aim of which was the restructuring of total institutions and the development of community-based institutions and residential communities. The Committee's aim was to empower and increase the autonomy of service users, protect their rights, and destigmatise people with mental health issues, users of illicit drugs, people with physical disabilities, the homeless, members of ethnic minorities, and others.[7] This movement also enjoyed political support. It was politically backed by the Socialist Youth Union of Slovenia, which was at the time a powerful and publicly respected political institution. Following independence, this organisation formed a liberal-democratic party, which was the leading party during the transition period in Slovenia in the 1990s.

Critical thought during the transition from socialism to neoliberalism in Slovenia

The 1990s saw the break-up of socialist Yugoslavia. Following a brief military intervention by the Yugoslav army in Slovenia, the independent state of Slovenia was established, which soon afterwards joined the European Union and NATO. This was also a period of rapid transition in Slovenia from self-managed socialism to (neo)liberal democracy. On the one hand, this involved the establishment of the fundamental principles of the rule of law and a democratic civil society. At the same time, privatisation processes were taking place, building on the then-dominant models of neoliberal capitalism. However, the liberalism promoted by neoliberal ideology was not the kind that fostered human rights and civil liberties, but rather the kind that makes all necessary resources available to capital. Slovenia did not escape the rapid mercantilisation and privatisation of economic resources, alongside the repatriarchalisation of social relations in both the public and private spheres. Thus, the transition from a state-party system to a market economy and political democracy in Slovenia primarily meant the establishment of a nation-state that became a dependent link in the global neoliberal agenda.

The most problematic aspect for Slovenian society during the transition was the shift from the high degree of equality under socialism to the polarisation of society and the division into winners and losers of economic and technological development in post-socialism. Social movements—such as student, feminist, LGBT and peace movements, which had fought even during socialism for the establishment of democracy, social justice and human freedoms, did indeed achieve some of their fundamental goals in the new circumstances in Slovenia, such as the abolition of one-party rule, ideological censorship and the establishment of political pluralism. At the same time, however, new

[7] These projects were professionally presented and discussed in several thematic scientific journals, for example the Journal for the Critique of Science, Imagination and New Anthropology (11, 1975), which was entirely devoted to the professional presentation of anti-psychiatry.

dilemmas have arisen regarding how to fight for certain fundamental human freedoms and rights in the new circumstances—rights that were already established during the socialist era, such as gender equality and equal opportunities in education and employment.

Above all, the situation worsened for those who did not have a stable position within this new structure. Consequently, during the transition period, we critical psychologists turned our attention to research in areas most exposed to the destructive effects of the illiberal transformation of society (Mencin, 2013). At the Faculty of Social Sciences, University of Ljubljana, where I teach and conduct research in the field of social psychology, I founded the Centre for Social Psychology with a few fellow psychologists (Vlado Miheljak, Metka Mencin), which operates within the Institute of Social Sciences. Over the last thirty years, the Centre has systematically conducted critical studies of youth and of adolescence, everyday life, life courses and gender studies. In particular, over the last thirty years we have systematically carried out studies on youth, and since 2000 in collaboration with European partners within the framework of EU projects.

In fact, it was during a study visit to Germany in the 1980s that I first became acquainted with the youth studies conducted there under the name Schell Studie[8] . It was then that I realised how important youth studies are, not only for identifying the characteristics of the younger generation, but also because of the developmental potential they hold. Young people are, in fact, an indicator of social change. That is why I felt it was very important to research young people in the transitional situation in Slovenia. It was immediately after my return to Slovenia in 1985 that I received an invitation to participate in a Yugoslav youth survey, initiated by the Institute of Social Sciences in Zagreb and the Institute of Social Sciences in Belgrade[9] .

The findings of the study surprised both researchers and the political public. It was the first study in Yugoslavia to highlight, through the differences in the life and value orientations of young people from different republics, just how great the differences between the republics of Yugoslavia were. Indeed, the differences between young people from different republics were far greater than the differences in their socio-economic or educational status. It was interesting to note that young people were most critical in their views on social and political issues in environments where the socio-economic situation was most favourable (Slovenia) and most politically loyal in environments where the political and economic situation was less favourable (Serbia, Bosnia) (Ule, 1988). It was this very study that highlighted the fundamental differences within Yugoslav society, which escalated a few years later into armed conflict and the break-up of Yugoslavia.

In post-war Yugoslavia, young people were an important social group, closely associated with ideas of development and progress. However, during the transitional period following the break-up of Yugoslavia, a shift in the concept of development also led to a change in attitudes towards young people, who are no longer identified as the driving force of development (Ule, 1995). We have

[8] Research into youth has been funded by the Shell Corporation since 1953, although it is entirely independent and conducted within the framework of academic institutions. Since 2002, this has been within the framework of the University of Bielefeld. The head of the research in recent decades has been the leading German sociologist of youth, Klaus Hurrelmann.

[9] The project, led by the leading Croatian sociologist Srđan Vrcan, took place between 1985 and 1987 under the title The Situation, Consciousness and Problems of the Young Generation of Yugoslavia (Vrcan, 1987). Researchers from research institutions across all the republics participated in it. The survey covered 6,840 young people aged 15–27 from all the republics of Yugoslavia.

observed this in the research we have conducted in Slovenia since the 1990s. As our research on young people has shown, social and economic status continues to play a decisive role in shaping young people's life trajectories, yet its impact is less visible and less direct, as collective traditions have weakened and pressures towards individualistic approaches to politics and life management have grown. This also signified a decline in the social power of young people and the exceptionally rapid transition of young people's cultural and political innovations from the phase of creation, movements and engagement into mass pop culture (Ule and Rener, 1998). Whilst these transitions contributed to the juvenileisation of mass culture, the narcissistic emphasis on perpetual youth and the rejection of stereotypes of adulthood, they by no means established young people as social subjects or even as agents of development and progress, but rather as subjects of mass consumption and the entertainment industry.

Academic institutions have also been exposed to the disruptive effects of the illiberal transformation of society in recent decades. This is a process that is, admittedly, characteristic of the entire Western world. The demand for the opening up of universities has, in a certain sense, been realised. The university has indeed entered the service of society, but in such a way that it is increasingly expected to serve the needs of the market. The ideal of knowledge has been transformed into a demand for information that is to be sold as effectively as possible. Yet there is a vast difference between knowledge and information. We are more informed than at any time in history. Standards of knowledge, and above all the capacity for critical thinking and reflection, are declining.

Various particular social interests are constantly being smuggled into research work, attempting to influence the management of science and scientific practice, yet their influence is rarely direct. Covert social interests often operate by creating a seemingly unproblematic hidden context of research and thought, within which certain procedures and practices are taken for granted and are, at least temporarily, shielded from criticism (Ule et al., 2015). Critical scrutiny highlights, for example, the hidden underlying value assumptions of science administrators and researchers, or the suppressed acquiescence to the particular interests of socially or financially powerful groups (Longino, 2001; Resnik, 2007). The hidden context poses a serious obstacle to the critical examination and reflection on many supposedly objective findings, statements, concepts or evaluations of scientific work.

Scientific work is already intensive and cognitively, emotionally and time-consuming, and takes place under constant pressure from the norms of scientific evaluation and demands for scientific excellence. It demands total personal commitment from the scientist and a great deal of sacrifice of short-term gratification for the sake of (uncertain) future achievements. The question, however, is whether researchers as individuals can consistently maintain and deepen such an attitude towards their scientific work. The American philosopher and gender theorist Judith Butler also drew attention to these dilemmas in her speech at the 2012 Adorno Prize award ceremony.

Butler drew on Adorno's famous observation in his work *Minima Moralia*, where Adorno states: 'Wrong life cannot be lived rightly' (Adorno, 1974: 30). Butler interpreted Adorno's observation as a rejection of the search for a good life in a bad social world. Following Adorno, she argued that it is entirely pointless to speak of ethical and moral matters in isolation from general social conditions, and that questioning the good life is tantamount to questioning the proper forms of politics, or social order (Butler, 2012: 19). In her view, this means above all problematising and rejecting the appearances of inevitability in the systemic production of unwanted and overlooked

people. Their lives are the paradigm of a bad life. Our own, supposedly good lives are also threatened by them, as human lives are interconnected. "My life is this life, lived here, in the spatio-temporal horizon established by my body, but it is also out there, implicated in other living processes of which I am but one." (Butler, 2012: 11)

This means that researchers of human lives and social ties should also systematically develop a keen sensitivity to attempts to neutralise or even conceal circumstances in which 'bad' lives are systemically generated, lives that may be missed or overlooked. Butler drew attention to this issue at the end of her speech. There, among other things, she emphatically noted that practically all of us in contemporary neoliberal societies are directly or indirectly exposed to universal precarity. We are threatened by potential circumstances in which we may lose the chance for a life worth living. Consider, for instance, the very real danger of a rapid and drastic transformation of contemporary society into an exclusionary, divisive and populist-oriented society that does not allow people to breathe and think freely.

Conclusion or a call to preserve community and humanity in dark times

Current events in Slovenia and the world are not conducive to critical thought and critical psychology. On the contrary, the absence of critical thought has given even greater impetus to positivist and individual-oriented psychology, which thus serves to preserve the neoliberal cosmos rather than the emancipation of people and society. Therefore, rather than developing explicit critical theories at this time, it is more important to develop and maintain a critical stance towards what is happening in society and in the world.

We can only maintain a critical and reflective approach to academic work if we are able to form intellectual collectives that command sufficient professional authority. Here I am referring to Bourdieu's concept of collective intellectuals (Bourdieu, 2000). In an essay entitled *'For a Scholarship with Commitment'*, Bourdieu discusses collective intellectuals as a social innovation which, if properly organised, would enable the coordination of collective action within an international network of critical scholars. According to Bourdieu, intellectuals who would form part of the collective intellectual body should subject the products of the politically dominant ideological and economic discourse in particular to rigorous social and discursive critique (Bourdieu, 2000: 43).

In fact, as early as the 1960s, the renowned theorist Hannah Arendt warned us in her almost prophetic speech on humanity in dark times that the social world is not something external to us, nor are we simply within it. The world lies between us, human beings. And we carry the world in this in-between space (Arendt 1965: 4). This in-between space is the foundation of humanity, of co-action, of empathy, of solidarity. This realisation is particularly important in a global crisis such as the one we face today. It is dangerous if the in-between space that sustains our lifeworld is narrowed and destroyed.

It seems to me that in the current crises of the modern world, such a narrowing of people's lifeworld is being imposed upon us from all sides. It also signifies a narrowing of ourselves in our humanity. From this, we can draw an important conclusion for contemporary psychology as well. Namely, the lesson that psychological theorising and research is all the more profound and far-reaching the more it succeeds in theoretically and empirically addressing and critically illuminating those aspects

of human social existence which constantly reproduce the crisis-ridden circumstances in which ethically and socially unsustainable differences between desirable and undesirable lives arise and become entrenched, and the more it confronts us with the fundamental principles of shaping the conditions for a life worth living. Therefore, one of the fundamental tasks of critical psychology today is to reveal, to the best of its ability, the current forms of narrowing the world and to help us in the struggle against the imposition of this narrowing as a kind of new normality. In this respect, critical psychology shares a common mission with other social sciences and humanities.

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