

## Editorial

Counsellors and psychotherapists in the UK are currently getting an intensive and involuntary political education through the prospect of regulation via the Health Professions Council (HPC). Many of us resent it, many of us avoid it; but this education is what happens to any group when it is brushed by the wing of state power. We have come to the attention of regulatory forces – which is in many ways not unlike being noticed by the Eye of Sauron; our only choices are therefore to acquiesce in one way or another or to resist in one way or another. It has been fascinating to see how many of us are ending up resisting.

Psychological practitioners may be among the least instinctively political social groups. After all, people who are profoundly drawn to working in private and in confidence with other individuals on deeply personal material are not likely to have a high degree of political energy. This has meant that the small minority who are politically energetic have been allowed to get on with it; and unfortunately the result has been a *trahison des clercs*, with that small political class taking its power and privilege for granted and identifying its own interests with those of practitioners as a whole. Hence Jeremy Clarke can say with extraordinary unselfconscious arrogance, in answer to a critical question about randomized control trials, ‘I find this so depressing... If you want to be a little arts and craft movement, and stay in a little backwater of the professional field, fine’ (Barden et al., 2009, 16). Those who have a personal need to be at what tends to get called ‘the Big Table’ generally despise those who don’t.

This trend has suffered a sharp correction through the recent UKCP election. Many individual registrants, it turns out, are not at all happy about HPC regulation; but because of their low political energy they have not known how to say so, or have not been willing to speak out. Given for the first time the opportunity to vote as individuals, they have elected Andrew Samuels as Chair on an explicit platform of opposition to HPC regulation. This has happened against the wishes and efforts of pretty much the entire political class of UKCP, who are stunned.

The election result meets most of the criteria for a velvet revolution (Garton Ash, 2009). Luckily, unlike Iran or Burma, the UKCP governing class lacks the means to (as Brecht sarcastically put it) ‘dissolve the people and elect a new one’ (Brecht, 1976, 440). The question is whether – as in so many velvet revolutions – therapists delegate their own potential power to say No to the individual they have elected as a symbol of that power, in which case they will inevitably become disappointed with him; or whether they will treat the election as a key step in their own individual and collective journey of political education towards empowerment.

It is still thoroughly unclear whether HPC regulation can be prevented: it has behind it the whole impetus of a major cultural trend towards regulation, monitoring, control, box ticking, and the spectacle of total security. Therapy doesn’t fit the boxes. But what we are learning is that it is no longer enough to not fit the boxes: if we do not actively resist, we

will be made to fit them. And through active resistance we necessarily become social critics: we point out the damage to society as a whole that this push to regulation is causing. Exceptionalism – ‘therapy is different!’ may not be enough.

This is an exciting issue, kicking off with a special feature on an approach to research that is diametrically opposite to that of RCTs. John Lees’ and Dawn Freshwater’s important recent book *Practitioner-based Research: Power, Discourse and Transformation* is discussed by Lees himself, and by Richard House and Stephen Paul from Roehampton and Leeds Metropolitan Universities respectively. This is followed by a long paper by Augustine Nwoye which opens up the whole field – probably previously unknown to many readers, including myself – of African psychotherapy, or rather as Nwoye calls it to indicate its unique features, Psychotherapy in Africa. This and Nwoye’s previous paper are our first contributions from sub-Saharan Africa, and we look forward to more.

Gillian Proctor’s important paper challenges many common assumptions about counselling and psychotherapy, including the fundamental assumption that they are a good thing. She casts it in the form of a dialogue between her practitioner self and her political self, struggling to come to terms with each other. The paper will probably strike chords with many of this journal’s audience. It contrasts with Gottfried Heuer’s work of historical scholarship, recovering for a modern audience the controversial early analyst Otto Gross, and arguing that his ideas are not only timely today but in fact still at the leading edge of therapeutic thinking.

Colin Lago’s paper is again a contrast with our other contributions, a highly practical (and extremely helpful) refinement of approaches to inter-cultural therapy. It dovetails with Judy Ryde’s new book on *Being White*, reviewed here by Havva Mustafa. The issue is completed by another of our ‘Documents from the Front Line’, Asaf Ben-Shar’s furious and painful letter to the British about the Palestinian-Israeli conflict.

## References

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