Psychoanalysis, Psychotherapies and the Psychosocial

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ABSTRACT *This paper explores the complex relationships between psychoanalysis, psychotherapies and ways we can think relationships between the psyche and the social in a globalised world. It explores both the promise and the limitations of post-structuralist traditions and the need to think beyond its terms if we are to open up a meaningful dialogue between diverse traditions and illuminate different levels of embodied experience. Drawing upon formative process of class, 'race', gender and sexualities it questions traditions of identity politics that might 'fix' identities into pre-given categories, so opening up spaces to explore complex embodied identities and diverse historical and cultural legacies. Drawing upon a range of empirical examples it seeks to open up new spaces for psychosocial research and new languages within which we can explore the psychosocial not as a space between discrete disciplines but as potentially transforming disciplinary legacies that have sought to separate 'psychology' and 'sociology' in ways that make it harder to illuminate transformations in contemporary globalised and transnational lives. Copyright © 2011 John Wiley & Sons, Ltd.*

Key words: myths, psychoanalysis, psychotherapies, critical psychology, psychosocial, post-structuralisms, identities, embodiments, affect, emotional lives, agency, Holocaust survivors, globalisation

MYTHS

When Salley Vickers used to teach classes on ancient literature she used to begin with the question 'What is a myth?' and then, at a suitable moment offer her own take on the subject: 'A myth is a fiction that gives us the facts.' Writing on the Oedipus myth she explains 'The facts that a myth deals in exemplify the protean quality of human nature: its restfulness and resourcefulness, its zeal for exploration and fascination with transgression.' She goes on to explain 'The currency of myth is what nowadays we call psychology, from the Greek psyche, soul or spirit; and therefore a myth is as much about the human spirit as about our instinctual nature' (Vickers, 2007, 22). Possibly she is reminding us of the importance of myth for both Freud and Jung and so the significance of holding open a conversation between them, rather than feeling a choice has necessarily to be made about positions we commit ourselves too. This is an *openness*

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that could prove as significant for a creative relationship with psychoanalytic and post-analytic psychotherapies as it is for recognising diverse traditions of psychosocial research.

In form and style, *Oedipus Rex*, as Salley Vickers recognises, 'is what we might be tempted to call 'strikingly modern', if the ancients weren't ahead of us in so much of what we suppose is novel and groundbreaking.' She reminds us 'It begins with an attempted infanticide. Oedipus's parents, the king and queen of Thebes, put him, as a new born baby, out on a mountainside to die, with his ankles cruelly pierced and shackled' (Vickers, 2007, 22). But she also warns us 'it is an error to assume that the sensibility of past civilisations is fundamentally alien to our own. In all known societies, infanticide by a mother is considered especially shocking. Nor would infant exposure by the privileged have been exonerated. It was the last resort of the poor, and then tended to be the fate of an unwanted female child' (Vickers, 2007, 22). This serves as a warning against a too easy moral relativism. But it can also alert us to the ways in which established intellectual disciplines when they achieve a renewed self-confidence can turn against their young who they might seek to murder at birth. They seek to exclude those who might challenge them.

In Stephen Frosh's remarks on 'Situating the psychosocial turn' in 2007 he shares:

> In my own career, I have for long wanted to find a way of reclaiming something progressive within psychology, and have used psychoanalysis, critical social psychology and social theory as ways of trying to do this. Now there is a sense that the battle has been lost, or at least has moved on. A conservative, normative, and politically reactionary psychology is reasserting its dominance, at least in the academic domain and probably in applied work too. The immense fascination with, and respect given to, evolutionary theory and neuroscience, coupled with general cultural pragmatism and vocationalism (i.e. a withdrawal from theory), has resulted in a narrowing of focus that excludes critical voices and has reasserted psychological 'expertise' at the expense of critique and democratisation. (Frosh, 2007, 1)

These remarks are taken from the opening presentation made by Frosh to the first conference that gathered people working in different ways in relation to the psychosocial to see whether there was interest in shaping a national network. He spoke about institutional changes that were happening in psychology in its move towards scientist explanations drawn from biology and the neurosciences and the marginalisation of those interested in social or critical methodologies. The quotations I draw upon were taken from the presentation and are taken to be representative of certain kinds of views and so in the spirit in which they were offered to the conference as ideas to think with. The 'critical voices' he refers to were to be banished from the discipline and, as far as many are concerned, could be left to die on a distant mountain. It is not clear where refuge will be found, though psychosocial work is turning towards the seemingly more generous embrace of a sociology that seems more at ease with its own theoretical diversities.

Telling the story of the young Oedipus, Vickers reminds us:

> This bleak event prompts a more heartening one. The parent's agent in the murder, a shepherd commanded to expose the child, succumbs to that most incalculable of all human attributes, kindness. The baby is given to a childless royal couple, who, unaware that they have a foundling prince on their hands, raise him as their own son and prince of Corinth. But a day of reckoning comes when, through a chance remark, the question of Oedipus's parentage begins to disturb him. And he sets out to close the fateful circle that will link him to his past and reveal his true origins. (Vickers, 2007, 22)

There might be a time when the psychosocial will find its own voice and feel a need to engage again with critically challenge prevailing boundaries within the disciplinary field of

psychology. It might be when existing trends have exhausted themselves and when their hopes of ridding themselves of the social, cultural and political are thwarted through the return of these categories within the materiality of their psychological processes.

What kind of parentage does the psychosocial have? Whose child is it after all and is this a relevant question or do its familial terms lead us onto an unhelpful path. I am not sure and for the moment I want to follow a hunch just a little further. There seems to be something worth exploring but this will have to be decided later. As Stephen Frosh understands the predicament, 'the critical edge is blunted with psychology, and those who wish to maintain a challenge to its orthodoxies are having to do so from somewhere else' (Frosh, 2007, 2). I do not think the same thing would be said about sociology and social theory as he fears, but as always it is difficult to know what dangers the future will bring to critical reflection. But he is still probably right to say 'we have a different kind of struggle on our hands now, to articulate a vision of the psychosocial that is not just a form of retrenchment, a way of preserving something that is likely to be lost, but can offer a real alternative' (Frosh, 2007, 2). Rather than defending positions that had long been established, the conference sought to open up new ways of thinking the psychosocial that went beyond the terms of traditional social psychology and so helped to think across the traditional boundaries that separated sociology, psychology, history and philosophy. There was a sense that new paradigms were needed not only to engage developments within psychology departments but also to illuminate emerging complex interrelations between the psyche and the social.

PSYCHOLOGY/PSYCHOSOCIAL

I think it can be helpful to set out how Stephen frames the dilemmas that the psychosocial still need to properly engage with:

> These dilemmas concern ways of staying committed to an agenda that gives value to personal experience, interconnectedness, intersubjectivity, agency and most importantly the impulse to articulate a kind of ethical subject; whilst at the same time acknowledging and drawing on the complete disruption of this agenda through the force of the revelation that there is no such human subject, that what we take to be the realm of the personal, including the famous 'inner world' of psychoanalysis, is wavering, fragmentary and lost. Amongst the many problems that this gives rise to is the repeated difficulty of uncovering a space for bringing together the psychological and the social without postulating these two separate spheres as distinct from one another; our repeated failures here make it harder to theorise what we might mean by the unhyphenated psychosocial: are we running together two things, or finding a third? (Frosh, 2007, 3)

(For some sense of the development of Stephen Frosh's work see, for instance, Frosh, 1994.)

The terms in which these 'dilemmas' are framed emerge out of the force of a post-structuralist critique and its challenges to what might be called 'humanistic' traditions that have been identified as 'essentialist'. For a time people thought they could think in terms of a 'strategic essentialism' as a way of holding, at least temporarily, to the different intuitions that people felt pushed between. It helps us explain why many people continue to feel, as Paul Hoggett expressed in his opening presentation, the need to maintain a hyphenated psychosocial that could somehow acknowledge the integrity of the 'inner world' it not its autonomy as maintained within Kleinian theory. He talked about the importance of dwelling on dreams and learning what they have to offer without feeling a need to interpret them as the 'internalisation'

of 'external' – social and political – forces. (For some sense of the development of Paul Hoggett's work see Hoggett, 2000, 2009.)

But Stephen Frosh's position seems almost unsettlingly schizoid as he feels the pressure of what seem to be irreconcilable positions. But it might be a time when post-structuralism and its focus upon discursive analysis no longer has the self-assurance to rethink the terms of some of the dualisms that it famously offers without somehow assuming that we can 'think beyond dualities' as many are hoping. It might be that we have to retrace some of our own footsteps and engage more critically within some of the assumptions that informed a post-structuralist critique, whereby we tended to think that identities are either 'given' in nature and so 'essentialist' or else they are 'constructed' within the terms of language and culture. In its own way post-structuralist traditions were shaped through their own oppositions between nature and culture, reason and emotion, bodies and souls. (Some helpful engagements with both the strengths and also some of the limitations of post-structuralisms are, for instance, Butler and Scott, 1992; Butler, 2004; Benhabib, 1997; Seidler, 1993; Chanter, 1995; and Nicholson and Seidman, 1996.)

We might have to return to rethink the terms of an ethical and political subject while questioning and holding in tension what Stephen Frosh calls 'the complete disruption of this agenda through the force of the revelation that there is no such human subject' (Frosh, 2007, 4). We might want to question the terms in which this revelation was framed and the forms of social and cultural 'constructivism' that it fostered. It might be that people construct different narratives of their pasts and for long periods might refuse to talk about it at all. Research with Holocaust survivors and refugees from Continental Europe have raised issues around testimony and 'truth' and there have been significant tensions between those who would treat their narratives as constructions of a traumatic past that will be told in different ways and the feelings of survivors that they are sharing the truth of what they have lived through. (For some helpful discussions around the nature of testimony and the questions it can open up for different forms of psychoanalysis and psychotherapy see, for instance, Roiphe, 1981; Lang, 1988; Young, 1988; Felman and Laub, 1992; Linden, 1993; Seidler, 2000; Margolit, 2002.)

This raises issues about ethical subjects and the nature of authority that are also issues within psychoanalytic traditions that have tended to assume that the analyst is the source of authority over the unconscious processes of their 'patients'. Even if relational traditions of psychoanalysis have sought to create a more shared vision of exploration they can still often be trapped in notions of transference and anxieties about 'interfering' in processes of transference.

Working with the testimonies of survivors we might want to insist on sustaining a notion of the 'human subject' since it was this very existence that the concentration camp sought to destroy. Through appreciating the vulnerability of human subjectivity and ways it can so easily be undermined and threatened through the workings of institutional and personal relations of power, we can begin to think in different terms about the capacities that sustain human subjects. I feel a certain hesitation in thinking about 'subjectivities' because this language often tacitly carries traces of rationalist forms of 'social constructivism' that I think need to be questioned if we are to imagine embodied forms of psychology and social theory. I have developed a questioning relationship to notions of identities as 'social constructions' and so towards a critical engagement with an identity politics that assumes the 'fixing' of identities in Seidler (2010). It is easy to be tempted into thinking that people can constantly remake their own identities through choices they make to frame their identities through different available discourses. Having experienced transitions from 'blacks' to 'African

Americans' we might think that these designations are necessarily provisional, while there might be historical clarifications as well as losses in shifting identifications. (For some significant reflections on changing identifications see, for instance, Gilroy, 1993, 2004.)

PSYCHE AND SOCIAL

While Stephen Frosh has long insisted that there is no such thing as the social–individual divide and that 'we only make it up to manage the difficulty of thinking a truly psychosocial subject, both emotionally and technocratically' (Frosh, 2007, 3), there is a way that this still is an impersonal framing that somehow tacitly disavows the gendered, classed or sexed nature of 'a truly psychosocial subject'. Somehow this echoes a post-structuralist rationalism that still finds it difficult to deal with the emotional lives of bodies and the different traumatic histories and memories that we might carry. At some level it seems to assume a tacit authority that goes along with a rationalism that can insist on its own authority. This seems to inform its relationship to psychoanalysis, feminist research and queer theory. These become traditions that can be deployed but from a tacit position of authority since the identification of the social researcher is often with the analyst rather than with the 'patient' or 'client'. This makes it easy to think in terms of defences both individually and socially against the authority of the interpretations that the analyst or the researcher might be offering. It might present itself as 'open' and 'democratic', but at some level it defends its own authority.

When Stephen Frosh asks: 'What might be the boundaries of psychosocial studies?' and says 'We know its heroines and heroes: Foucault, Butler, Klein, Lacan, Althusser, Hall and behind them Marx and Freud' (Frosh, 2007, 2) he sets out the genealogy of a particular generation that tended to read Marx through Althusser and Freud through Lacan. This was the generation that came after the 1960s and were educated in psychology and sociology departments in the 1970s and 1980s. But I think that there is a difficulty if we do not engage critically with this inheritance and somehow recognise that there were different voices and different paths that did not pass through post-structuralism in the same way. Some of these traditions were more hospitable to a psychosocial sensibility partly because of their refusal of the notion 'that there is no such human subject'. There are also complex breaks in the work of these different theorists, possibly most evident in Foucault, Butler and Hall, that need to be carefully engaged with.

For instance, Foucault in *Technologies of the Self* (Martin et al., 1996) explores the breaks that he feels he has to make in his own work from a focus upon relationships between knowledge and power to a concern with ethics and subjectivities. This is a transition that, as he explains, he cannot make for himself easily so that it involves a shift in relation to how we might understand an 'ethical subject'. Foucault was aware of the need to make a break in his own thinking as he came up against the limits of the intellectual framework he had set himself through thinking relationships between power and knowledge. But this was a transition, as he admits, that he cannot really make himself. Rather it marks a break in his writings as he moves towards attending to the relations between subjectivities and ethics. (For a sense of the earlier framework that informed Foucault's work see Gordon, 1980; and for a sense of how he imagines the developments and breaks in his own thinking and writing see Martin et al., 1996.)

There is a break with Foucault's emphasis upon governmentality that was already prefigured in *Discipline and Punish* (Foucault, 1975), where he is obliged to acknowledge in his political work with prisoners that their identities are not framed through the discursive practices of

criminologies but they have their own resistant practices through which they shape their alternative identities. In Foucault's reflections on the political work he did with prisoners he does recognise how their identities as prisoners are not simply articulated through the available discourses of criminology but are constantly refiguring their own experiences and identities also in resistance to these discourses. Possibly the significance of this realization is something Foucault finds hard to fully engage with. Though Foucault was never able to discern relations between power, ethics and subjectivities, so voicing the limits of his earlier work and the need he felt to take a different direction in his thinking, possibly this remains the task of a viable psychosocial tradition. His later work is opening up spaces that were too quickly closed down in the writings of his more theoretical writings. It is when he stays more in touch with issues within the social world, like madness or punishment, rather than attempting to approach issues of epistemology and ontology in more generalised terms, that his work seems more helpful.

When Frosh says: 'holding on to the social–individual divide is a kind of tactical move, something drawn on in order to oppose totalitarianism (the individual is precious; everyone has a right to exist) and more often used to obscure the mechanics of subjectification' (Frosh, 2007, 4), we need to be careful about the different things we can mean by 'the mechanics of subjectification' and the ways it denies people a sense of agency in relation to their own lives. Though this point is often made, it is often asserted too generally. Not only do we constantly need to oppose totalitarianism but we also need to *create* forms of social scientific research that will make Auschwitz *impossible* because of the ways they sustain notions of equal dignity, respect and well-being. Though theories of 'social construction' seem to leave individuals free within postmodern cultures to shape their own identities, they can often tacitly shape their own visions of social determination since they can find it difficult to illuminate the spaces people have to shape their own lives. Some of these tensions are explored in interesting ways in the different biographical introductions and the differences between them in Nicholson and Seidman (1996). As the authors explore shifts in their own thinking brought about partly by the pressure of life events, we sense tensions that still remain unresolved between experience, language and power.

JOURNEYS

Kranuan is a village in one of Thailand's poorest provinces, though it is a long bus ride from Bangkok. It is no coincidence that a lot of its young women end up in Bangkok's red-light district. Some of them have already had children with local men and they have become disillusioned in their relationships and want something more from their lives. Monica Garnsey's film 'My Boyfriend, the Sex Tourist', (Garnsey, 2008) portrays women neither as victims nor as victors. This is an exploration of the value of love against a backdrop of poverty and few choices. These women have witnessed other women in their local village-built houses financed by their foreign husbands and they can see the different lives that their relationships have made possible.

Sometimes they want some of this for themselves and some who do not want to leave their children with their mothers and insist on looking after them themselves make use of a local woman who helps put their images on the Internet and checks the responses they get. But they have to pay for the time and for her skills in communicating in English. Sometimes they get offers from different parts of the world, but when they mention their children the

messages cease. Lek, a woman who felt disappointed and is running out of money to pay for the Internet, decides she will go to Bangkok and explore the possibilities of working in a bar as a way of getting a foreign husband. 'I'm thinking of working as a bar girl,' says Lek. 'After all, I've had sex with my Thai boyfriends and it was all right.'

The film also follows the life of a woman already working in a bar whose female manager has been paid a retainer so that she doe not have to go off with other foreigners while he is trying to arrange for her to get a visa for England. She has left the village and her children are being looked after by her mother. She says her children do not call her mother but rather their grandmother and that at other times they will identify their 'mother' as any attractive young woman who might be around when they are asked. These seem to be painful revelations but they are offered in a matter-of-fact kind of way. She is constantly on the phone to her boyfriend in Sheffield and feels desperate and powerless when he does not return her calls, fearing the worst. She has invested in a future with him, but she can never be sure whether he will return or whether she will get to England. The dream of having a foreign husband is the source of karaoke songs and is common enough for the local area to hold an annual Best Foreign Husbands Awards in which contenders have to prove how well they have adapted to their wives' Thai culture. These are the lucky ones and many other women look on, hoping that something similar might happen to them.

But there is also an air of desperation as globalisation lays bear global relations of power and ways these are gendered. The young women in the bar fight each other when they have a bad evening and there are few customers. They are caught in competitive relationships and know that their exchange value very much depends upon their age, bodies and beauty. Their bodies have become marketable commodities and, though they might have some sense of agency, you recognise how limited this is as you identify a hint of menace in the girl's descriptions of beatings and non-payments for services rendered. They talk about the shame they feel when they are refused payment and how they will not talk about it. The prostitution takes place in other spaces and the bar takes no responsibility. Their business is secured through the drinks and through the money that the men pay the management to be able to take the girls off. You recognise the opportunities opened up through global media and the Internet but at the same time how they underline the power of global white masculinities in negotiations with Thai women, who are seen as exotic others. The woman manager in the bar says it is much safer in the bar because they have face-to-face contact with the men but that on the Internet there are a lot of psychos looking for sex.

'REALNESS' OF THE PERSONAL

Drawing on an earlier paper on the perspective of psychosocial studies in psychology Frosh recognises that 'Psychology is so heavily embedded in a vision making the individual primary, and there are such apparently good ethical, moral and scientific reasons for seeing things this way, that rethinking it not just to "take account of" the social but to see the social as what constructs the personal, without losing sight of the "realness" of that personal domain, is a vastly difficult task' (Frosh, 2007, 4). But part of what might make this so difficult is the post-structuralist reading of what it means 'to see the social as what constructs the personal'. We might be in danger of 'losing sight of the 'realness' of that personal domain' because it is rarely what we start with, even though feminism and sexual politics encouraged us to do so,

but what we are attempting to reach towards and so not forget through a theoretical framing that somehow is given priority. This was the warning that Wittgenstein gives in breaking with his earlier work that tended to be theoretically driven and imagines that the social world is framed through cognitive constructions. (Monk, 1980, is a helpful intellectual biography of Wittgenstein's work that helps draw connections between his life and shifts in his philosophical work. Malcolm, 1986, offers a philosophical engagement with Wittgenstein's work that has a sense of the transitions in his work.)

At the same time, possibly influenced by the work of Whitehead and Stengers and the recognition that objects have lives of their own and through relationships with objects we shape processes of human lives, Frosh wonders whether we are

in danger of becoming too humanistically social scientific in our methods (for instance, giving too much weight to the speaking of the story-telling subject), too individualistic despite our Foucauldian reading lists, too *therapeutic* in our attitudes? Is it time for the psychosocial to become more hard-edged and disruptive, more stony in its response to appeals to emotion, less willing to valorise anything remotely relational? (Frosh, 2007, 4).

These questions are framed too generally and the dissatisfactions they express need to be named more clearly as well as the ways they fail to illuminate problems we are trying to engage with.

As he tries to speak more clearly it becomes clearer what he is attempting to name that might go beyond the territories defined as 'psychological' and 'social'. Speaking about the psychosocial

can also be seen as ways of dipping into something more 'elemental', and to resonate with an impersonal force, a kind of alivenesss, that runs through them all. What seems to me important about this elemental is that it is a space of interconnectedness, what at other times might be called life' or 'zoe' and which is not restricted to the human … but is also a space of disturbance, because it is always moving on, the ultimate attestation to fluidity, and allows no solidified forms. (Frosh, 2007, 5)

Drawing more on a Deleuzian impulse Frosh recognises that

the questions we might ask within this framework start neither with the psychological nor the social, so they are not applications of one to the other, or how each influences the other; nor do they divide up an 'inner world' from an external one. They ask about what flows through subjects, what activities and material objects produce them, what desires run through them and what they constrain and produce. (Frosh, 2007, 6)

This means 'we need always to seek ways of making-strange so that we can encounter the oddness and newness of these objects, their resistance to appropriation.' This is to develop a transdisciplinary practice that 'negates the easy assumption of "in here, out there", subject and object, psychic and social' (Frosh, 2007, 6. For a sense of the ways Deleuze's work engaged critically with certain Freudian traditions within psychoanalysis see, for instance, Deleuze and Guattari, 1977.)

Of course there are dangers of reaching in too many directions at once, though it is helpful to be reminded of life as a process of becoming and so of movements across diverse bodies – biological/material – emotional – mental – spiritual. In recognising how we live within different bodies that are constantly *interrelating* to each other so we begin to appreciate the different levels

or layers – different charkas as a Hindu tradition might teach – at which we can 'close down' so that aspects of self become unavailable and we can no longer *connect* to particular experiences and traumatic events and no longer narrate different parts of our lives that we would often choose to pass over in silence. But when we think about human development and so the different stages of processes of development through which babies grow and develop both in and through their relationship with significant parental figures we are not moving into a new territory that is somehow distinct from either 'psyche' or 'social' but somehow recognising ways of recognising *formative processes* that operate through different dimensions and levels of experience. It is partly because we recognise that children need consistent relationships and engagement with parental figures that we know the destructive consequences of poverty and social inequalities. (A helpful notion of a formative psychology, though one that possibly remains too firmly framed within a sense of biological processes, is offered by Stanley Keleman, 1985. For a more expansive sense of his work see, for instance, Keleman, 1975, 1979).

As I watched a BBC programme entitled 'Born Survivors: Growing Up Skint' shown on 19 December 2007 that looked at the lives of Moonisha, who was growing up in the Bangladeshi community in Hackney, Matt and Peter from Glasgow and Hayley from Mansfield, I heard the voices of a diversity of young people growing up in poverty. In their different ways these were bright children who were determined to escape poverty in their own way while appreciating what their parents were providing for them. They felt seen by their parents and supported in their desires to shape a different life for themselves. They were aware of drugs and gang life but eager to keep their distance so they could aspire to something else.

It was the awareness of what children knew about poverty and how much more they knew than parents would have realised. They were aware both of what their parents were contending with and the efforts they were making in difficult conditions of life. They did not really consider themselves poor. Moonisha had seen real poverty in Bangladesh, so she appreciated the KFC meals they could have, even though it had to be a rare treat. Matt and Peter have seen documentaries about famines in Africa and it was touching to hear them talk about the urgent need to help the people of Sudan, as they surveyed the disintegrating wasteland that is the Possilpark Estate. They had mapped their paths of escape, with one of them looking forward to going into the army while also valuing looking at his artwork from primary school that he kept safely under his mattress. They also appreciated how different gangs would come together for Guy Fawkes' night and how for a moment at least territorial conflicts would be put aside.

FREUD'S OEDIPUS

When we think about 'making things strange' we might think about how Freud saw Oedipus as the exemplar of the twin impulses to patricide and incest. 'King Oedipus, who slew his father Laïus and married his mother Jocasta,' Freud wrote in *The Interpretation of Dreams*, 'merely shows us the fulfilment of our own childhood wishes' (Freud, 1900, 262). In this way the Greek narrative was to be universalised as if our childhoods were not radically different from each other, marked by class, 'race', sexuality and other differences. For Freud it was significant that he selected a Greek rather than a Jewish narrative, for this also became a way of displacing his own Jewishness and the sufferings of otherness it provoked. But as Salley Vickers acknowledges, 'Simple it wasn't, either for Oedipus or Freud. The Oedipus complex

was to become the linchpin of Freud's theory and for the rest of his life provoked the fiercest rows and the most impassioned defence' (Vickers, 2007, 22).

But Vickers also recalls her own unease with the myth:

I first began to consider the myth as Freud interprets it as part of my own psychoanalytic training. And it seemed to me then, as now, a misreading. Oedipus is the one person whom it is safe to say doesn't have the complex named after him. He is a fully potent adult male when he encounters his bellicose father and first takes his life, then his place as ruler of Thebes and husband of the widowed queen. (Vickers, 2007, 22)

She also argues that in his interpretation

Freud had missed something every bit as taboo as infantile sexual desire – the parental wish to annihilate their own offspring and the inevitable recoil that brings. In the logic of the narrative, this act is the mainspring of all that follows. It is as if, the myth tells us, the procreative principle is haunted by a harrowing spectre – the countering impulse to destroy whatever is closest to us. (Vickers, 2007, 22)

It could be argued that Freud reaches a similar idea in his later notion of the death instinct.

Of course, we will read these myths in our own ways. I would put more emphasis on the place of the father and ways that he can so easily feel displaced as his wife's love that he has so readily assumed within a patriarchal culture was organised around him had turned towards the child. Fathers can feel angry and experience this as a rejection they can find hard to cope with. Often this is the moment they can turn towards other women to meet their sexual desires. But this turning away from the father can also be an expression of dissatisfaction for the mother for she might feel that she never really receives the love and recognition she wants from her relationship with her partner. She might feel that once the marriage had been sealed and she was no longer being pursued, that he had turned away from her and was absorbed in his own life. Within a patriarchal marriage she might feel as if his energy and love had been withdrawn from her as if she is expected to fall into the background and appreciate that he is putting all his energies into being a provider for the good of the family. But she can experience a sense of loss and rejection and this can be an additional motivation in turning towards her baby for love.

But the father can also feel jealous and angry that a love that they had taken for granted had been turned away from them. Unless they can find a loving connection with their own children within patriarchal fathering they can find themselves locked into competitive relationships. But this reflects a danger of universalising a fathering relationship that can take different forms within particular historical and cultural settings. But Salley Vickers also recognises that

Where Freud had a point, though, is that Sophocles's drama unfolds in a manner very similar to the process of an analysis. At the start of the play, Oedipus is cock of the roost – successful ruler, faithful husband and father, and wholly unconscious of his own antecedents and the threat to his sense of identity that lies hidden in his own history. Most of us organise our lives on the basis of not knowing who or what we are, and what makes Oedipus unusual is that he sets about disrupting the state of affairs, although quite unwittingly at first. (Vickers, 2007, 22)

But possibly this is a path that people have to take if they are to grow into their own authority, and so not so unusual.

Vickers recognises that Sophocles' story 'is not a pious account of a world ruled by supernatural forces, against which humankind has no recourse, as is if often claimed; but rather a shifting set of Chinese whispers, where fear and self-preservation are presented as the real governors of moral choice and action' (Vickers, 2007, 22). Freud recognised this and also understood the weaknesses of an Enlightenment modernity that assumed that people wanted to know both about themselves and the world. If people are framed within a postmodern sensibility as being able to construct whatever identities they want to perform of themselves on the assumption that there is only surface appearance and no reaching towards a deeper connectedness with self and others, then it can be tempting to frame the psychosocial in voluntaristic terms. But Freud and the post-analytic traditions share a recognition that people have to face themselves and their emotional histories if they are to find their own voices and explore the conditions of a meaningful life within an unjust globalised world. Rather than being able to turn their backs to this world to focus upon their own enjoyments, this world will intrude and they will feel morally challenged to respond.

Salley Vickers recognises that the play

> is about the human relationship with knowing: what we know but don't want to know; what we don't wish to know; and what we suppose, erroneously, we do know. Oedipus begins by trying to avoid knowledge of who he is, even to the extent of misreading his own name. *Oidi-pous* means swollen foot and refers to the scars he bears on his feet from his early injury. But the Greek for 'swollen' is a homophone for 'know', and he takes his name to mean know-foot and forces a false identity out of this pseudo knowledge.' (Vickers, 2007, 22)

Naming is a complex process and at different points in our lives it might feel appropriate to name ourselves in different ways. But rather than being a construction, often this is a response to an inner feeling and a sense of unease in the world we inhabit.

There might be gains as well as losses in these different namings but often there is a narrative that has to do with 'feeling more real' or more ourselves in these different namings. As Vickers says of Oedipus, 'It is his very knowingness that is the stumbling block to real knowledge' (Vickers, 2007, 22). But it is also Freud's recognition that we are struggling for 'real knowledge' that informs both psychoanalyis and psychotherapies, through they might disagree on the best path to follow. Consequently they might have different things to offer to psychosocial research practices. As Vickers recognises:

> What gives Oedipus heroic stature is that he has the moral courage finally to abandon his cover and decipher the deeper riddle of his own birth and history. Far more dismaying than the shocking impropriety of our desire, Sophocles suggests, is the shocking impropriety if self-knowledge. Most look away rather than meet it. (Vickers, 2007, 22)

But possibly we do not have to accept the choice that Vickers seems to be offering us for Freud was trying to explore the relationship of sexuality to self-knowledge and ways that this investigation had been blocked within the dominant Christian traditions within the West that had framed sexuality as 'animal' and so as threats to the very status of 'the human'. Drawing on Jewish traditions Freud knew otherwise. (For some sense of the complexities of Freud's relationship to Jewish traditions see, for instance, Bakan, 1965; Robert, 1976; Krull, 1986;

Diller, 1991; Gilman, 1991; Yerushalmi, 1991; Seidler, 2008.) But there has also been a tendency in the move away from instinctual towards object relations to forget sometimes what we could have learnt from Freud and so to create a false distinction between sexuality and knowledge and between desire and relationship. So when Vickers concludes 'It is here that Freud's connection with the myth becomes most salient, not because of Oedipus's urge to incest and murder, but because of his willingness to own and bear what has been disavowed' (Vickers, 2007, 22) we might recognise this as false choice.

Similarly, when we think about the place of psychoanalysis and psychotherapies in shaping psychosocial research traditions we need to think of a plurality of different traditions that we can engage with critically. Rather than assume that there are methodologies that can be applied, we need to recognise the questions we confront when we engage with a changing globalised social world. This involves a willingness to transform analytic concepts as they are brought into relation with existing conditions. In this way, we do not assume that it is social relations that have somehow 'failed' because they refuse to be fitted into theoretical conceptions. Rather we are concerned to shape concepts that can illuminate rapidly changing social worlds while allowing for individuals and groups to establish deeper connections with themselves as they struggle to make a globalised world more democratic and just.

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