

Psychotherapy, Politics, and International: A Professional Introduction

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ABSTRACT *This article introduces a new Associate Editor. The author's professional career and work reflect the importance of the impact of social context in understanding distress, and of non-Western psychological healing traditions. Copyright © 2012 John Wiley & Sons, Ltd.*

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I am delighted and honoured to have been asked to become an Associate Editor of *Psychotherapy and Politics International (PPI)* and to have this opportunity to introduce myself.

I am Professor of Psychology in the Department of Psychology of the University of Dodoma, Tanzania, East Africa. Prior to joining the University of Dodoma in 2008, I taught and undertook research at Kenyatta University, Kenya, where I served both as Chairman of the Department of Psychology and Director of the University Counselling Centre. Previously (from 1986 to 1996), I held a teaching position at the University of Jos, Nigeria, before moving to Kenyatta University. I was instrumental in the development of psychology degree programmes at both Kenyatta and Dodoma Universities and in the injection of an African presence in those programmes. I am a specialist in counselling and psychotherapy with a focus on family systems and narrative therapy. My research and writings are anchored in the area of African psychology, a field in which I am well known both within the African continent and internationally (see Nwoye, 2009, 2010, 2011). I am a member of the International Family Therapy Association, in which I was the first black African to serve on its Executive Board of Directors for two consecutive terms.

In 2005 I won a competitive bid to develop counselling modules for the training of people working with disadvantaged children and youth. This was within the GTZ-PROSYR training programme, popularly known as Sungara. (GTZ is the acronym for Gesellschaft für Technische Zusammenarbeit [the Society for Technical Cooperation] and PROSYR refers to its Youth Training Programme in Kenya; sungara is a Kiswahili word for rabbit, which is understood as a wise animal in traditional Africa). I developed 20 modules for this purpose, and was the training consultant in the programme that was organized for empowerment of officers from the Ministry of Home Affairs (Department of Children Services and National

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Youth Service), the Ministry of Gender, Culture, Sports and Social Services (Youth Division), the Ministry of Labour (targeting the District Employment Officers), and various others from Civil Society Organizations working with children and youth in Kenya.

In 2006 I led a psychology research team from Kenyatta University to win Kenya's Ministry of Education tender to undertake a Baseline Survey on Guidance and Counselling in Learning Institutions in Kenya. The result was intended to serve as a planning data for strengthening the practice of professional guidance and counselling in learning institutions in Kenya.

In the course of 25 years of academic teaching and research experience, I have won visiting fellowship positions at the Universities of Cambridge (UK), Toronto (Canada), and Stockholm (Sweden), at the Covenant University in Canaanland, Ota, Ogun State, Nigeria, and at the premier University of African Scholarship, the University of Kwa-Zulu Natal, Durban, South Africa. Through my research and writings in the area of African psychology and psychotherapy, I have attempted to identify and develop an African paradigm for mental health, and to promote the visibility and significance of African indigenous psychological healing systems in world scholarship. In this regard I have developed a number of Afrocentric theories designed to enhance the study and understanding of African psychological practice. I have published four books and many articles which have appeared in the *Journal of Family Therapy* (UK); *Journal of Humanistic Psychology* (USA); *American Journal of Family Therapy*; *Contemporary Family Therapy* (USA); *Journal of Family Psychotherapy* (USA); *Australian and New Zealand Journal of Family Therapy*; *Dialectical Anthropology* (Netherlands); and, more recently, *Psychotherapy and Politics International* (UK).

I won the African slot bid and contributed to the four-volume *Comprehensive handbook of psychotherapy at the threshold of the century* (edited by Kaslow, and published in 2002 by Wiley). With Nhlanhla Mkhize and other African experts, I co-edited the well-received pioneer textbook on African psychology *Rhythms of an African psychology*, to which I also contributed four chapters. I have also contributed two entries—on restorative justice and on the method of restorative conferencing—to the *Encyclopedia of peace psychology* (edited by Christie, and published in 2011 by Wiley).

I hope that this summary of my interests and outputs indicates how I fit into the principal concerns of *PPI* in its three constitutive aspects, i.e. psychotherapy, politics, and international. My psychotherapy training favours the need for a pluralistic model, including Western and African psychologies and a multi-partial orientation of giving of equal recognition, respect and attention to existing psychotherapy systems. This is reflected in the publication of articles in *PPI*, including one of my own (Nwoye, 2011), which cut across the psychological healing traditions in Western and non-Western societies. Similarly, the recognition in *PPI* of the vital relationship that exists between politics and life, and emergence of human distress in context, is in line with the emphasis in my own clinical practice on the need to explore the social context to try to understand the factors responsible for the distress of any given member of society. This perspective was one of the major themes in my article on "A psycho-cultural history of psychotherapy in Africa" (Nwoye, 2010), which drew attention to the fact that "Psychotherapy in Africa should address not only the intrapsychic or interpersonal world of the clients but also phenomena that in the traditional western psychotherapy are not considered essential, namely, the socio-cultural context" (p. 26). Finally, the vision of *PPI* to take an international or inclusive perspective in imagining the scope of the journal's readership is very much in line with my own

view that a journal concerned with mental health will be moving in the right direction if it pays due attention to the globalized nature of the current world, and the cosmopolitan nature of human populations in major cities in the world. The value of this internationalist vision of the journal cannot be overemphasized. This is because some academics in the global South have often had to contend with the situation in which their manuscripts for publication are vetted in many Western journals, not from the point of view of quality or message of their contents, but rather from the extent to which they are considered relevant to serve the interest and needs of a Western, i.e. a European and American, audience.

It is essential to encourage *PPI* to remain steadfast in its championing of psychotherapy, politics and the international, and, in this, of encouraging articles that do not merely propagate the interests of one theoretical approach to psychotherapy, or those of one racial group of its potential readership, or those that omit to consider the social and the political in mapping out the basis for the occurrence of a given psychological problem in a presenting individual or group of clients. Standing firm in this regard will be instrumental in helping to consolidate *PPI*'s unique location and significance in the current world of academic and professional journal publishing in the Western world – and, as an Associate Editor, I am delighted to be part of that stance.

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