

Unacceptable Complicities and Necessary Articulations between Psychotherapy, Politics and Internationalism

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ABSTRACT *This article introduces a new Associate Editor. It clarifies certain connections—and disconnections—and articulations between psychotherapy, politics and internationalism. Copyright © 2012 John Wiley & Sons, Ltd.*

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I have an ambivalent standpoint on the connections between psychotherapy, politics and internationalism. From my critical perspective, some of these connections are unacceptable complicities and must be denounced, questioned and condemned; while other connections are necessary articulations and have to be established, reinforced or defended. In this brief introductory article, I will try to clarify these two kinds of connections and my standpoint on each one of them.

UNACCEPTABLE COMPLICITIES

Unacceptable complicities are generally centred on the surreptitious subordination of psychotherapy as an “ideological apparatus” to the political projects of the ruling economic powers (Althusser, 2006). These projects include the pseudo-internationalist global project of a bourgeoisie that “creates a world after its own image” by “compelling all nations” to “become bourgeois themselves” (Marx & Engels, 2011, ch. 1). After all, bourgeoisie and petite-bourgeoisie are the “chattering” and “psychological-minded” classes best suited for psychotherapy (Parker, 2007, p. 115). We may then understand why psychotherapeutic work contributes to an *embourgeoisement* of people, and, by *embourgeois*ing people, psychotherapy “does not serve people, but an ideal” (Deleule, 1972, p. 151).

Psychotherapy may serve the bourgeois ideal while seeming to serve people because it identifies people with this ideal and its metonymical expressions: success, enrichment, productivity, competitiveness, assertiveness, adaptability, flexibility, resilience, empowerment, development, growth, and so on. This psychotherapeutic identification, through an “interpellation” that turns individuals into ideological subjects (Althusser, 2006, pp. 130–141), ultimately

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amounts to an identification of real individuals with the *par excellence* symbolic value of the bourgeoisie, namely *the capital: wealth or money*. We may say that money effectively enables people *to be* in the only place where they *can be*, in the global symbolic system of capitalism, thanks to a recognition that makes possible their subjection to the system.

Just as in the Middle Ages the land and the horse were *ontological resources*, so in Modern times money is “the means” that “enables people to be”, and thus it necessarily becomes “an end in itself” (Marx, 1968, p. 99). Money develops into a hidden widespread end to which people are subordinated as means, tools or instruments. This “instrumentalism”, based on the “utility of men”, instead of a “utilitarianism” which seeks “utility for men”, is the usual political choice made by psychotherapy (Canguilhem, 1958). We see here the accommodating psychotherapeutic mission of simply “fulfilling the assignment” or “carrying out the job decided by the system” (Deleule, 1972, p. 79).

The only true justification of most psychotherapy lies in the system and its still prevailing “industrial” political project of creating not only normal and adapted people, bourgeois-minded consumers or “integrated citizens”, but also productive, simple-minded “good workers” (Deleule, 1972, p. 63). Since this cannot be acknowledged without revealing a support to the system’s political project, aware and scrupulous psychotherapists prefer to justify their work by simply arguing its supposedly apolitical efficacy (Canguilhem, 1958). This justification, however, already presupposes the complicity of psychotherapy with the “industrialist” problem-solving and goal-oriented ideology that avoids any kind of “speculative thought” (Canguilhem, 1958), or explicit political positioning, and encloses itself in the limits of “liberal empiricism” and capitalist “technocracy” (Deleule, 1972, p. 81). In these narrow limits of “mental deafness”, any “psychotherapeutic application” can only be a “practical wisdom affected neither by speculation nor by indignation” (Lacan, 1965, p. 9). The only allowed psychotherapeutic political emotion will be a system’s dominating fury, the apparently apolitical “*furor sanandi*” [rage to cure] (Lacan, 1999, p. 323). This emotion is necessary in order to counterbalance and *cure* the pathological furious “shame”, an openly political “sort of anger” that always threatens the system with a revolution (Marx, 1982, p. 335).

The prevalent anti-revolutionary use of psychotherapeutic work is not only facilitated by its “supposed scientific asepsis”, which obviously means accepting the all-encompassing political “dominating perspective” (Martín-Baró, 1998, p. 299), but is also made possible by two fundamental assumptions underlying current psychotherapy. On the one hand, the liberal assumption of individualist “equalitarianism” supposes individuals with individual problems (Canguilhem, 1958) in “a classless society with equal opportunity for all”, which logically impedes “radical political work with therapists” (Parker, 2008, p. 4). On the other hand, following the “pious wish” of “explaining psychology as a natural science” (Marx, 2011, para. 9), the “biological” assumption of “individuals separated from the environment” (Canguilhem, 1958, ch. 3) determines a focus on “adaptation”, on “functions and norms” (Foucault, 1966, p. 368), as well as the “psychotherapeutic purpose” of “normativation” (Lacan, 1998, p. 319) and the ensuing “political segregation of abnormality” (Lacan, 1999, p. 334).

NECESSARY ARTICULATIONS

Against the psychotherapeutic biological politics of “normality”, “adaptation”, “likeness” and cure of “differences” and “abnormality” (Deleule, 1972, p. 102), I definitely

opt for the “materialist-dialectical” politics of “unavoidable differences”, “absolute contradictions”, and “intrinsic struggle” (Mao, 1970, pp. 49–80). So I choose, for psychotherapy, the “liberating politics” of “desidentification, disagreement” and truly internationalist “multiplicity” instead of the national “police politics” of “depoliticization” through “identification” with the globalizing pseudo-internationalist bourgeois ideal, with its metonymical expressions and its correlative structural positions, its “fixed, imposed identities”, and its “exact names” in a stabilized “hierarchical organization” (Rancière, 2007, pp. 9–73, 112–125).

My choice entails the reinterpretation of the conservative Comtean-biological psychotherapeutic model of the “organic way of being” in terms of the subversive Marxian-economic and Freudian-linguistic perspectives of the “conflictive” and “interpretative-structural” conceptions of the psyche (Foucault, 1966, pp. 369–371). Only in these perspectives may we understand that “mental health” is not an “individual state”, but a dimension of “interpersonal and inter-group relations” (Martín-Baró, 2003, pp. 334–338). This dimension demands not an individual psychotherapy based on the liberal individualistic assumption, but rather a kind of “socio-therapy” (p. 201), a “popular praxis” involving a “politicization of psychology” that assumes our “class conditioning”, and goes beyond, through desidentification, to make an “ethical option” (p. 300).

Real “ethics” will necessarily contradict a range of “psychotherapeutic” subordinations to the global political projects of the ruling economic powers (Lacan, 1999). Unacceptable complicities between normalising biological-individualistic psychotherapy, liberal-capitalist police politics and global-ideological identification to the bourgeois ideal have to be challenged by the ethical option for the necessary complex articulations between international class-struggle and liberating psycho-politics of indignation, desidentification, and revolution.

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