

EDITORIAL ARTICLE

Psychotherapy and politics international: A personal and professional introduction

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Abstract

This article introduces a new Associate Editor. The author's heritage, international life experience and career reflect the influence of diversity and relational connection in a world that continues to struggle with the politics and psychology of alienation.

KEYWORDS

alienation, diversity, relational psychotherapy

1 | INTRODUCTION

I am delighted to have been asked to contribute to this journal in the role of Associate Editor and to be given this opportunity to introduce myself personally and professionally. I am looking forward to becoming acquainted with new colleagues and readers of this stimulating, creative and necessary journal.

I identify most as a practitioner, working these past 20 years as a psychotherapist, supervisor and peripatetic trainer of psychotherapy in the South of England. This is the area where I have spent much of my adult life, though my childhood and adolescent years were spent in very different landscapes. My father holds dual citizenship as a Pakistani and British man. He was raised in colonial and postcolonial India and experienced the violent partition of the country as a teenager. He travelled to London in the 1950s to find work and here he met my English mother. My father's determination for a university education and the publication of his book *Pakistan: Its Ideology and Foreign Policy* (Hussain, 1966) led to an opportunity for him to lecture in International Relations in the University of Ibadan, Nigeria, so, as a young child, I was uprooted from my mother's country and went to Nigeria which was then in the middle of the Biafran war. I introduce myself via my historical backdrop and experience of witnessing a bitter civil war because these life experiences have shaped me both consciously and unconsciously. As a child of a bi-racial and bi-cultural marriage, I embody both coloniser and the colonised and this informs the academic and professional interests to which I am drawn.

2 | SOCIAL, POLITICAL AND PSYCHOLOGICAL LANDSCAPES

I used the term, "landscapes" earlier partly as an expression of the influence of my first educational degree, which was in geography. My interest in the environmental sciences maintain my curiosity about the influence of our landscapes on our psyche. As a psychotherapist, context seems crucial to me – whether that be natural, social, economic and/or political environments. I think about how our "outside" influences our internal psychic processes and how the internal

shapes our perception of the outside. External and internal psychic landscapes are, in my view, relationally bound. As I write this, I look out of my window at the illusion of peace in my winter garden. Whilst my garden often brings me comfort, I am disturbed by the deaths today of 12 people in Berlin. This is the city where my father currently lives and has done so for nearly 40 years. I move from here to imagining the other landscapes where people are on the edge of life and death. The devastating stories we have heard from Aleppo have been terrible to listen to and glimpse briefly on our news in the UK. Then my mind moves to other war zones in Africa, Asia, South America. There are many places I have not seen that have complex politics creating tyrannical experiences for citizens. From traumatic violence, to creative tensions, thinking about the challenge of diversity and difference and how this underpins human relations at the micro and macro levels takes centre stage in my clinical practice and my writing.

3 | THE PREMISE OF ALIENATION

My writing has been influenced psychologically and politically by both academic and literary texts. These include recent authors such as Christina Wieland, Narendra Keval, and Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie, as well as by earlier writers such as Simone de Beauvoir, bell hooks, Stuart Hall, Chinua Achebe, Toni Morrison, and Alice Walker. Having been raised in Nigeria and also having had many friends whose families came from the Caribbean has stirred a special interest in African, American, and Caribbean experiences. I have felt personally and deeply moved in my studies of post-colonial Africa, the oppression of Apartheid in the countries of southern Africa, the history, politics, economics of slavery, and the struggle for civil rights in America during the decade in which I was born. These have encouraged approaching my work with a political mind and to this end, I am particularly interested in the concept of alienation. Taken originally from Marx, his philosophy was used by the radical psychiatry movement in the 1960s and 1970s as a way of understanding social and psychological distress. The premise that all distress is an expression of alienation is a simple, yet profound idea. In my field of transactional analysis, there were a number of practitioners and writers that worked with this, notably Claude Steiner and Hogie Wycoff to name two pioneers, as well as, more recently, Keith Tudor and myself (see, Minikin, 2011; Minikin & Tudor, 2015). These ideas continue to inform my work and my writing and I look forward to further opportunities to develop these in this journal.

4 | RELATIONAL PSYCHOTHERAPY AND ENGAGING WITH DIFFERENCE

Traditionally in the West our thinking and theoretical development in psychotherapy has focused on the mind of the individual, often with cultural context and environment being minimized. Freud and subsequent theorists used close observations of patients in discovering an understanding of how the mind works. The study of individuals underpins his fascinating theories about the nature of the conscious and unconscious components of our minds. This continues to be the premise for most psychotherapy practice in the UK in understanding patients and their intrapsychic functioning. In more recent times, there has been a paradigm shift towards relational (for example, Bromberg, 1998; Mitchell, 1988; Stern, 2004), co-creative (Summers & Tudor, 2014), and pluralistic perspectives (such as Wieland, 2015; Keval, 2016). Currently, my interests lie in integrating a philosophy based on alienation with relational approaches which account for environmental and developmental trauma and the resulting capacity for dissociation. Contemporary thinking and practice in progressive psychotherapies offer possibilities for new experiences to be born and shaped from relational contact.

I am sharing how deeply my emotional and intellectual identity resides in an engagement with politics, diversity and a relatedness to self and others. It matters to me that my work in psychotherapy means more than simply sitting in my garage extension with a few individuals that need help with their mental state. My work holds meaning to me for how I contribute as a citizen and is a commitment to myself and society to engage with anti-oppressive practice and do what I can to develop greater consciousness and capacity for reflection on this planet. To this end, this journal

seems to offer opportunity for connection, pluralism and democracy, at a time when intolerance and tyrannical approaches to understanding social and political difficulties seem to be on the rise in the West.

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