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BOOK REVIEW

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Psychotherapy, anthropology and the work of culture

Edited by Keir Martin

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This edited volume offers a range of insights into the relationship between social anthropology and counselling/psychotherapy (hereafter "therapy"), with particular emphasis on the training process. These fields have much in common: both deal with human experience, encompass a focus on lived human relationships, often take a holistic approach to understanding persons and collectives and include a vibrant mixture of loosely related schools, modalities and approaches. This collection of texts can therefore be read as an experiment in what emerges when practitioners trained in these two domains come together, taking stock of both the origins of the two fields and their possible future directions. All the authors are trained social anthropologists, while all but two of them are also qualified therapists. My reading here is that of a UK-trained ethnographer focused on political anthropology, who is also a trainee therapist learning transactional analysis in Serbia/Croatia.

The collection begins with a polemic by Keir Martin on charges not infrequently levelled at therapy, including by anthropologists themselves. In short, the main charge is that therapy embodies a form of individualism described as "Western," given its focus on the "internal lives of bounded individuals." In Anglo–American/Western European contexts, a reply to this charge has resulted in a focus on culture and cultural competence as a component of training courses. However, Martin argues that this focus is often based on a multiculturalist imaginary, whereby individuals belong to one or several bounded cultures. This imaginary has now been rejected wholesale by many anthropologists based in the West. Martin also argues that relational ideas regarding the self, assumed to be extremely novel by some anthropologists, have long been central to therapists' work, which has "always problematised the distinction between the inside and outside of the self by showing how the same relations make up both, and it is only through a careful process of sorting and differentiation that particular boundaries between the inside and outside of the self emerge" (p. 16).

In Chapter 1, James Davies begins with an auto-ethnographic overview of his involvement in both fields. The tensions between the critical perspective his strongly poststructuralist anthropological training gave him and the redemptive, less questioning approach in therapy resonate with existing critiques—especially those from critical psychotherapy—arguing that therapy training can often be excessively uncritical or, to use a transactional analysis metaphor, "Parental." Rather than bracketing culture off as a topic packaged into a training programme, Davies suggests viewing therapy as a "work of culture" in itself. Nomenclatures and modalities are thus not only explanatory and descriptive, but also prescriptive, and can result in patients' culturally scripting their behaviours through a process of mimesis, a point reminiscent of labelling theory.

In Chapter 2, Junko Kitanaka offers a fascinating history of psychotherapy in Japan. This includes a discussion of key figures such as Hisao Nakai and Joji Kandabashi. This history has been characterised by attempts to "overcome a mistrust of the psychological," as per the chapter's title, and includes a different understanding of

privately held secrets. The value of keeping certain things secret contrasts with an implicit Western understanding of the therapist's role as being to "excavate and reveal secrets such as unconscious desires, anxieties and conflicts thought to be deeply rooted in childhood experiences" (p. 48). The perspective from Japan deeply promotes an awareness of the damage that certain Western therapeutic practices might incur through trying to induce psychological insight.

In Chapter 3, Inga Britt-Krause brings both social anthropology and systemic psychotherapy directly into the therapy room, through her analysis of specific case studies and her discussion of Gregory Bateson, an anthropologist influenced by cybernetics who was also active in systemic psychotherapy. I particularly liked how, in the case study material, Britt-Krause placed anthropological and therapeutic interpretations alongside one another. She suggests that systemic psychotherapists often have an understanding of culture as abstract difference—yet, despite this, the systemic approach to relationships has a lot of common ground with anthropology.

Keir Martin continues with his focus on culture in Chapter 4. Specifically, he analyses the "work" that the concept of culture does when used in therapy training, creating separations between the cultural and non-cultural. He argues that the concept can cause significant damage if unnecessarily introduced by the therapist in the therapeutic encounter, and makes the case that it is most useful when introduced by clients in their own way. Underlying Keir's analysis is the structure of the disciplinary training field in the UK, where professionalisation is actualised not through statutory regulation but via accrediting institutions such as the British Association for Counselling and Psychotherapy (BACP). The tick-box emphasis on continuing professional development and the BACP approach are quite specific to the UK state context, and so an analytical focus on the state/the everyday geopolitics of therapy might prove fruitful in further developing these arguments and considering situations in other contexts where state logics operate quite differently.

In Chapter 5, Karen Seeley considers the history of psychoanalysis, and offers a reading that draws on arguments made in the sociology of knowledge and history of science—namely that the content of the psychoanalytic approach was significantly contingent on the specific social and cultural moment (concretely here, the decline of the Habsburg Empire). The second half of the chapter applies the ideas from the first half to a concrete case study, where separations between the individual mind and its sociocultural and political worlds are melted down somewhat.

Salma Siddique argues in Chapter 7 for the potential therapeutic relevance of auto-ethnography as a space between the therapist and client, describing how relational perspectives can emerge in this space. She emphasises how auto-ethnography is a space in which authors reveal their vulnerability as well as their power, and also notes the lack of cultural diversity in the therapy room both among clients and therapists. Her focus on an in-between space linked to some of the themes in Britt-Krause's earlier chapter.

In Chapter 8, Vincent Crapanzano gives an anthropological colouring to the concept of transference through a discussion of therapy training he experienced. He then builds on this through a discussion of diagnosis, noting that, even in modalities that claim not to diagnose, implicit stereotyping often takes place. Following this, through the disturbing early-twentieth-century case study of Ellen West, a patient who committed suicide, he situates the various diagnoses she received within the political and social context of the time.

Finally, in a succinct afterword, Sudhir Kakar raises a number of important points, the most prominent being that, in the absence of knowledge of the cultural practices and lifeworlds a patient/client inhabits, a critical awareness and appreciation of one's own background is of key relevance. Indeed, this is what social anthropology—almost always a comparative endeavour—can bring to the table. Kakar also raises the question of language, relatively little considered directly in the other sections, and of what is gained through participating in the therapeutic process as a client when it takes place in the language one spoke as a child.

This collection raises an important set of issues for anthropologists to consider in their practice. However, I suspect the main impact of this book will be in reshaping how concepts of culture are used and prescribed/explored in psychotherapy training. The "common ground" between the two disciplines is most keenly felt in terms of methods—

which, while different, both involve key commitments to listening to and understanding others. In future works the emphasis on language discussed in the afterword could be further developed and integrated, especially as Martin and Crapanzano touch in places on linguistic anthropological insights. As a final point, it would be interesting to compare readings with scholars trained in psychological anthropology, and with other disciplinary and geopolitical positionalities.

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