ISSN: 1556- 9195

Psychotherapy and Politics International

THE BAATN JOURNAL

PSYCHOTHERAPY AND POLITICS INTERNATIONAL

EDITORS

Karen Minikin, Independent Practice, Wellington, West Somerset, UK

Dr David Pavón-Cuéllar, Universidad Michoacana de San Nicolás de Hidalgo, Morelia, México

CONSULTING EDITOR

Professor Keith Tudor, Auckland University of Technology, Auckland, Aotearoa New Zealand

PAST EDITORS

Professor Keith Tudor, Auckland University of Technology, Auckland, Aotearoa New Zealand (2011–2022)

Nick Totton, Sheffield, UK (2003–2010)

PAST CONSULTING EDITOR

Professor Andrew Samuels, University of Essex, UK (2003–2022)

EDITORIAL BOARD

Rotimi Akinsete, University of Oxford, Oxford, UK

Dr Neil Altman, Psychoanalyst, New York, USA

Dr Gávi Ansara, Clinical Director, Ansara Psychotherapy, unceded Boonwurrung Country, Kulin Nations, land colonially known as ‘Australia’

Dr Arlene Audergon, Research Society for Process-Oriented Psychology, London, UK

Dr Jessica Benjamin, Psychoanalyst, New York University, USA

Dr Emanuel Berman, University of Haifa, Israel

Dr Sandra Bloom, Associate Professor, Health Management & Policy, Dornsife School of Public Health, Drexel University, Philadelphia PA, Philadelphia, USA

Nicola Blunden, Metanoia Institute, London, UK

Jocelyn Chaplin, The Serpent Institute, London, UK

Professor Divine Charura, University of York, St. John, York, UK

Deepak Dhananjaya, Psychotherapist, Supervisor, Prabhava Institute of Inclusive Mental Health, Bangalore, India

Eugene Ellis, Director, Black, African and Asian Therapy Network, London, UK

Dr Gottfried Heuer, Association of Jungian Analysts, London, UK

Professor Dr Gordana Jovanović, Independent Academic, Faculty of Philosophy (retired), University of Belgrade, Serbia

Professor Kuniko Muramoto, Ritsumeikan University, Kyoto, Japan

Professor Emeritus Augustine Nwoye, University of KwaZulu-Natal, Pietermaritzburg, South Africa

Professor Renos Papadopoulos, Tavistock Clinic, London, UK

Professor Ian Parker, Discourse Unit, Manchester, UK

Mary-Jayne Rust, Jungian Analyst; London Ecopsychology Group, London, UK

Waka Oranga (Organisation of Māori Psychotherapists, Health Care Providers and Allies), Auckland, Aotearoa New Zealand

AIMS AND SCOPE

Psychotherapy and Politics International explores the psychological implications and consequences of the political, and the political implications of the psyche, both in theory and in practice. The premise of this journal is that psychotherapy is a social and political activity that asks us to examine the processes of self-deception that perpetuate individual unhappiness, as well as social structures that are inequitable and oppressive. Historically, political concepts and values, and their effects, have not been central to the therapeutic process, although that has changed. The journal welcomes articles from all modalities or schools of psychotherapy internationally and from across the political spectrum.

COPYRIGHT

Psychotherapy and Politics International (*PPI*) has non-exclusive publishing rights. Authors retain copyright over their own work. Authors are welcome to upload their papers in published form into their institution's research repository. They retain the right to republish their papers elsewhere, provided they acknowledge original publication in *PPI.*

Authors are responsible for obtaining permission to publish images or illustrations with their papers in *PPI*; neither editors nor publishers of *PPI* accept responsibility for any author's/authors' failure to do so.

Psychotherapy and Politics International

2024, VOL. 22, NO. 1, 1–3
https://doi.org/10.24135/ppi.v22i1.02

Online ISSN: 1556-9195 Journal homepage: https://ojs.aut.ac.nz/psychotherapy-politics-international

EDITORIAL

Karen Minikin*[1] and **David Pavón-Cuéllar**[2]

[1]Iron Mill College, Exeter, UK; Leadership Team, Black, African and Asian Therapy Network, UK

[2]Universidad Michoacana de San Nicolás de Hidalgo, Morelia, Mexico

INTRODUCTION

This issue comes out at a time when there have been many elections across nations. Some have sustained existing governments, and some have voted for radical changes. Given political power influences ideology, we are satisfied to offer another issue of *Psychotherapy and Politics International* (*PPI*) that explores the relatedness of the systemic to the Psyche. In this issue, authors explore the structure and processes of institutions and how these feed into interpersonal and intrapsychic dynamics, becoming the work done within the consulting room. The peer-reviewed articles reflect the tradition in *PPI* in exploring these themes academically as well as clinically. A note from the front line addresses the role of support groups and the letter we include speaks out about the horrors we are witnessing in the Middle East. We trust the issue will be stimulating and thought provoking and we welcome further feedback from readers.

PEER-REVIEWED ARTICLES

This issue includes four peer-reviewed articles that address hot-button social and political topics such as populism, racism, crime, incarceration, and intimate partner violence. The first two articles offer diagnoses, analysis, and interpretations, while the following propose solutions in the fields of education, ethics, and therapy understood in a broad sense.

In the first of the peer-reviewed articles, entitled ‘A leader or a father?: Exploring transference in large groups as an explanation of populism’, Yana Nikolova interprets the populist tendencies of political forces through the psychoanalytic concepts of ‘transference’ and of ‘name-of-the-father’. The usefulness of these concepts in understanding the

*Contact details: karen@insights-sw.co.uk

unconscious dynamics of populism is exemplified by the 2021 elections in Bulgaria. Nikolova's interpretation demonstrates how clinical experience allows us to shed light on social and political phenomena of large groups such as the masses of voters or supporters of leaders or parties in national movements or elections.

Like Nikolova, Seán Manning focuses on subjective processes when interpreting social problems, although no longer at the political level, but at the institutional and interpersonal level. Manning's article, entitled 'Troublesome boys, prison, and intimate partner violence', critically analyses criminal justice systems, drawing on authors such as Simone de Beauvoir, Georges Canguilhem, Michel Foucault, Nikolas Rose, and Judith Butler to theorise the effects of incarceration on subjectivity and in the sense of self. Referring specifically to incarcerated young men, Manning argues that their incarceration perpetuates the conditions of their violence against intimate partners.

Manning's critique of the justice system is followed by a collective reflection on a counselling training program in the article 'Possibilities and limitations of anti-racist training within a counselling programme', by Matthew Whitney, Gillian Proctor, Divine Charura, Tom Denyer, and Kat Wade. The authors draw on a thematic analysis from the participants of a specific anti-racism session within counselling education at the University of Leeds. Based on the responses of the participants, the authors propose that counselling courses should be a space to challenge inequalities, work for social justice, decolonise the curriculum, deconstruct racialised identities, and create conditions of self-reflection and openness for an anti-racist praxis.

Anti-racism first requires the recognition and denunciation of racism in society. This denunciation implies in turn an enunciation of truth such as that which Michel Foucault identified with the Greek term 'parrhesia', which is analysed by Bert Olivier in his article 'Parrhesia as therapy in fragile times'. Discussing Foucault's work in detail, Olivier reflects on the ethical and therapeutic value of the enunciation of truth for those who enunciate it in a political context like the current one.

NOTE FROM THE FRONT LINE

In addition to the four peer-reviewed articles, this issue includes a note from the front line, written by Luis Gerardo Arroyo Lynn and entitled 'An introduction to mutual support groups based on the work of Alan Robinson'. The author draws on the work of the Argentine Alan Robinson, playwright and critic of psychiatry, to question psychiatric discourses and perspectives due to their individualism, their concept of health, and their neoliberal logic. To confront all this, Arroyo Lynn proposes mutual support groups, discussing their possibilities of application in the field of mental health.

REVIEWS

In this issue, we also offer two book reviews of the same book. *Outrageous Reason* by Peter Barham warranted attention from two different reviewers. Both reviews acknowledge this a powerful book, thorough in its analysis of the pervasive nature of the White mind. Sham Selvaratnam acknowledges how the book has spoken to some of her particular life and professional experiences as a bi-cultural woman with influences from Sri Lanka and the UK. In doing this, she links the systemic with the professional and the personal. She expresses her appreciation of Barham's writing in how the author connects the scholarly with lived experience. Kieran Mac Feeley also writes acknowledging his identity as a White man and how the book evokes pain for him as a reader in absorbing the depth and breadth of oppression inflicted on the racialised Other. Kieran describes his appreciation of the research Barham has conducted, making this a meticulous text when it comes to signposting and referencing other authors on this subject. Both reviewers recommend this book to scholars and practitioners in mental health fields.

LETTER

The preparation of this issue of *PPI* has coincided with the Israeli Army's bombings of the Gaza Strip that have killed at least 40,000 people, mostly defenceless civilians, of which two-thirds are women and children. These facts are the reason for a letter in which Fauzia Gaba judges the situation from her point of view as a psychotherapist, referring to her own feelings and those of her clients in her therapeutic work. Gaba clearly describes what is happening as a 'genocide' and as an 'annihilation'.

LOOKING FORWARD

The next issue of *PPI* will be a special issue guest-edited by Andrea Guerra and dedicated to the topic of psychoanalysis and decolonisation. The issue will include contributions by authors from Brazil, Mexico, Malaysia, and the United States who participated as key speakers at a conference on the same topic held in Belo Horizonte, Brazil, in November 2023.

Psychotherapy and Politics International

2024, VOL. 22, NO. 1, 1–21
https://doi.org/10.24135/ppi.v22i1.03

Online ISSN: 1556-9195 Journal homepage: https://ojs.aut.ac.nz/psychotherapy-politics-international

PEER-REVIEWED ARTICLE

'A leader or a father?': Exploring transference in large groups as an explanation of populism

Yana Nikolova * University of Northampton London (UoNL), UK

ABSTRACT

The main aim of this article is to provide an alternative explanation about the occurrence of populism through the lens of psychoanalysis. Using the concept of transference, the article explains why populism occurs in politics and what the unseen unconscious psychological processes are that form political choices in some societies. It also aims to open a discussion about what type of culture, society, or large group may experience transference when populism is on the rise, and also what type of populism may be the result of transference.

Using the example of a popular media figure winning an election in Bulgaria in 2021, this work combines political, social, and psychological literature on populism with the psychoanalytic concepts of transference (Freud, 1921) and 'names-of-the-father' (Lacan, 2013) to explore some large-group processes (Volkan, 2020). By bringing transference from the field of psychotherapy to the field of politics and large-group studies, the work offers a new explanation of why populism is a phenomenon of psychoanalytic nature.

On the strength of exploring the role of transference in large groups within a specific context of politics, the content makes a contribution to the literature on group transference, extends its application to the social and political sphere, and brings the concept of transference to Vamik Volkan's large-group psychology field. This addresses a gap in current psychoanalytic literature related to social and political phenomena such as populism. Hence, the work creates a bridge between the fields of politics, psychotherapy, and psychoanalysis.

KEYWORDS: transference; populism; large group; name-of-the-father; politics

*Contact details: yana.nikolova@london.northampton.ac.uk

INTRODUCTION

After twelve years of discontents facing different social problems, governments, and parties, Bulgaria—the sixth poorest country of the European Union (EU) (EU Commission, 2020; Nielsen, 2016)—entered a period of political and parliamentary crisis. An election was held on 4 July 2021, but the formation of a government proved impossible at this time.

During this period, the emergence of a well-known music producer and media mogul had become the last hope for Bulgarians. Social media, particularly Facebook, turned out to be the main resource for political discussions among Bulgarian citizens. Bulgarians were openly expressing their desires for someone to 'save the nation', to 'look after the nation', and to 'help the people'. These collective emotions had patriotic content that manifested in comments such as: 'He can scratch the corruption!', 'You are the only one to save our nation!', 'You are only the one to fix Bulgaria', and 'We give you Bulgaria!'. This was a demonstrated attempt to place the attainment of state dependency (Kaysel & Mussi, 2022) on one person. It was clear that the Bulgarian large group was inclined to search for a rescue figure. This person was expected to have combined authoritative, protecting, leadership, and masculine characteristics.

The striking feature of the political discussions that Bulgarians had in the public space was creating a 'set of requirements' for the eventual leader that the Bulgarians demanded. The new person had to be a 'legally approved' Bulgarian citizen who was also a 'legitimate person'. In addition, they had to write in clear and grammatically correct Bulgarian, because otherwise such mistakes were 'not acceptable for taking the lead of the country'. Bulgarians demanded having a clear communicator and protector to understand and explain everything. They needed an informed person who knew about the popular (for 2021) COVID-19 vaccination debates, European funding, immigrants, wars, health, politics, business, religion, culture, and history. Most importantly, Bulgarians desired their new leader to glorify the name of Bulgaria and its culture, language, traditions, and history.

An ideal image was formed. The image that emanated from the Bulgarian large-group desire was of a popular pop-folk (*chalga*) singer who had been a well-appreciated media showman and TV owner since the fall of communism in Bulgaria. With him being elected brought about two questions—what does the Bulgarian large group really want—a leader or a father? Another question that arose from that is to whom does the Bulgarian large group feel drawn to and why?

As different demands and desires were combined with emotions, this led to the surprise election of Svestoslav Trifonov. This popular figure combines the roles of a showman, singer, producer, media presenter, and a well-known nationalist supporter, who has been in the public space since 1990 (Manolov, 2021; Marinov & Popova, 2021). This means the group was not only drawn towards a leader in an already established role, but was willing to select and assign a political role in a crucial time for the country to someone who has no experience in

politics. This choice has led to three questions: (1) how a media celebrity can be selected for a political role; (2) what triggered the Bulgarian large group to make this choice; and (3) to what extent was this choice relational?

In attempt to answer the questions above, this article takes the concept of transference to explain large-group decision making and the experience of populism. It also discusses what the psychological causes behind a collective choice of a popular figure are and why cases like Bulgaria bring the concept of 'transference' into large-group studies. Even though the concept of transference applies mainly to the therapeutic setting, transferring or directing feelings from one to the other takes place in any social context too. Therefore, exploring transference outside the therapy room is needed when searching for answers about large-group behaviour in political and social spheres. This is why the article focuses on how transference can be an alternative (if not the main) explanation for populism.

EXPLAINING POPULISM AS A POLITICAL PHENOMENON

When researching populism, the main fields of studies that come up are politics, international relations, history, and social policy. They describe populism as a social and political 'two-way' phenomenon that depends a lot on the connection between the leader and their followers (Ostiguy, 2017).

Through the lens of political science, the literature agrees on defining populism as a 'global phenomenon' whose ideological foundation is 'nourished' by a nation and its people (Urbinati, 2019). Additionally, there are clear indications for populism performing mechanisms that clearly work within cultural, social, economic, and religious conditions (Urbinati, 2019). Moreover, populism happens concurrently with nationalism (Singh, 2021). In this regard, political and social formation processes make populism a specific 'model of development' (Kaysel & Mussi, 2022, p. 94). When discussing the Latin American situation, an encounter of dependency is present. This demonstrates the state being dependent on the masses and on ideology with nationalistic content that goes into populism (Kasel & Mussi, 2022). Populism has an ideological function that rises when there is a decline in the political representation (Martin & Berrocal, 2022; Salgado, 2019), especially when democratic principles become transformed (Urbinati, 2019).

As much as populism has its political explanation, some psychological explications have been encountered by political scientists, demonstrating a search for a deeper understanding. What can be seen among those attempts is defining populism as a society's 'self-defence mechanism' (Martin & Berrocal, 2022, p. 88) against the system during moments of insecurity. Some emotions (fear and anger) have been discussed alongside feelings of helplessness, vulnerability, and uncertainty. This is discussed as running simultaneously alongside a national identity crisis (Martin & Berrocal, 2022). Beside nostalgia and national sentiments,

emotions have been related to discussions on populism around Brexit. The debate is if the British nostalgic reaction of national identity or an expression of a need of a group to defend itself caused Brexit. This remains unanswered according to Martin and Berrocal (2022). In a search for answers, this article aims to introduce a psychoanalytic concept that relates more to seeing *why* and *who* people legitimise as an event or a leader. This may pave the way for responses and moving closer to understanding a large group's selection of a 'charismatic leader'—seen as a figure that offers solutions to problems in a fixed political position and with strong media engagement.

Another moment the literature addresses is how populist narratives are able to 'cultivate' the feelings of insecurity. The cultivation is connected to emotions—both addressed within a 'discourse style and frame', as well as a 'political strategy' (Stathi & Guerra, 2021; Weyland, 2021). In agreement with Laclau's view on populism, Chantal Mouffe (2018) describes populism as a 'discursive strategy'. As such, it has ideological forms, according to 'both time and place'. The occurrence of populism is specific to historical time, forms, and discourses around a country's current affairs. Discourses originate from cultures because as a concept 'discourse' engages with power and knowledge, expressed through language and communication. These are two elements of culture. This means the experience of populism is a culturally unique event, such as the 2021 election in Bulgaria. Also, this may give fluidity and adaptability to the used discursive 'strategy' that depends on the two-way relationship between a leader and their followers.

In its relation between people and the system, populism has the role of a 'thin-centred ideology' (Mudde, 2004, p. 544). As such, it splits society between people and the elites opposing them. The psychological side of populism, coming from the works of Mouffe (2005), Mudde (2004), and Carral et al. (2023), sees populism as an 'archaic form' of identification based on 'emotional belonging' to a community (Carral et al., 2023, p. 3). This manages people's emotions and their group attitude in a concrete situation. It relates to people's feelings of to which large group they belong to. Belonging in this case becomes the emotional ability to establish identification with a leader. This creates feelings of closeness combined with a revolutionary gist that brings the populist 'the people vs. elites' attitude.

Mudde (2004), Ostiguy (2017), and Aslanidis (2018) recognise that populism has a 'discursive frame', which is navigated through communication and media. One element of it is an image of 'popular masculinity'. Ostiguy (2017) explains this image as people's 'fighting heroes' who perform decisive actions. These characteristics more or less relate to the ones of a childhood father figure who is proven to be responsible for the development of social processes, discipline, sensing protection and strength, as well as experiencing authority and domination. As a representative of a communist bloc and being a collective culture (Ivanov, 2010), Bulgaria has these characteristics strongly embedded within one 'unifying' figure. It is presented as a 'hero' in the social psyche, symbolising protection. Hence, populism in some cultures becomes a result of the presence of these figures because of the unseen

psychological material transferred onto someone else rather than something else. This poses the question of what type of populism may be the result of transferred father-like characteristics onto a leader.

Particularities of populism

Recent work by Timothy Appleton (2023) discusses whether populism can be located as left or right wing. Appleton concludes that it can be either one or the other because of the connection between populism and people's behaviour being directed by their 'passions'. These passions make populism an emotional response. As such, it can be seen as more irrational than rational. Another reason is what Appleton sees as the 'Other affect', related to 'popular enthusiasm' (Appleton, 2023, p. 61). Looking at the historical and cultural makeup, feelings can be different for individualistic or collectivist societies where the Other has a different sort of social and political power over people.

Appleton, like Singh (2021), sees populism connected to nationalism. Using Badiou's work, Appleton states that today people may still carry out a 'national liberation struggle' (Appleton, 2023, p. 75). He states that this struggle can be around any form of national liberation, communism, and/or transition to socialism. This relates to the Bulgarian case where there is something that Appleton sees 'transcending' a situation. He relates it to a 'void' which can be seen in different ways, either for the country or for the holder of power. Either way, though, it is a psychological void felt by the people. Additionally, for Appleton, '"the people" form the sovereign' (Appleton, 2023, p. 76). This void can be seen as the Bulgarians' desire mirrored by a populist figure in a moment of insecurity.

The word 'sovereign' holds a lot of meaning and emotions around independence and freedom to Bulgarians. It represents one of the Bulgarian national distinctive characteristics related to history. Bulgarians experienced five centuries of Ottoman rule during which they did not have the power to rule their own land. This period is recognised as painful and referred to as the 'Turkish yoke' (Tsanov, 2017). This word for Bulgarians means 'slavery'. This period accumulates a lot of negative emotions that were replaced by unity and a fight for independence. This ended with the Russian–Turkish war of Bulgarian Liberation and the Unification of Bulgaria, both achieved with a major contribution from Russia. Not long after these moments of national sovereignty being felt, Bulgarians entered a 45-year period of communism that formed the Bulgarian national identity which built on the Ottoman past. Both these periods gave two images of powerful Other(s)—one destroying the Bulgarian large group (perceived as its enemy as the face of the Ottomans) and another one building and rebirthing the Bulgarian spirit (as the face of communism). In these two cases, authority was imposed over the Bulgarian large group.

Bulgaria's intense history left its people with no breathing space between periods of change. The themes of helplessness, vulnerability, and neediness combined with independence, unity, and established statehood appear to be conditioned historically in the

Bulgarian psyche. As a result, the nationalistic idea may be quite strong and may facilitate patriotic feelings that engage the population with images around the country's past, current situation, and future visions. When explaining populism and to whom a large group can be drawn to, this leads to consideration of what Appleton (2023) calls 'national particularities' within Mouffe's (2018) notion of 'discursive strategy'.

Bulgarian national particularities are a result of many ups and downs. However, they are related to how the populist discursive frame is played out in a collective culture with a strong nationalist idea and a turbulent historical past. This allows for the application of specific strategies that mirror, express, and potentially mobilise national problems, alongside their underlined emotions of identification, closeness, and belonging. This can be skilfully embedded in any political program that represents the future of a great country and large group. The Bulgarian example of such an idea is manifested by electing a TV host and musician who promised to scratch the corruption, save the country, and establish a great future for Bulgaria.

The Bulgarian example demonstrates the existence of a deep psychological process that forms specific voids in the large group—masterly navigated desires—all managed through distinct actions by a populist figure. These actions can be viewed as tactics that have 'cultural components' (Ostiguy, 2017) as well as social, national, and psychological specifics.

EXPLAINING POPULISM AS PSYCHOLOGICAL PHENOMENON

The psychological framework can be mainly explained from two theoretical angles—cognitive and behaviourist. Both are linked to emotions when exploring people's psychological experiences of populism.

The cognitive perspective explains populism in relation to a large group forming perceptions in the context of power and authority. This leads to people following extreme movements such as radicalism and xenophobia, as well as nationalism and propaganda (Forgas et al., 2021). At the same time, cognition bonds with emotions. The emotions related to authority and power are anger and fear. They are a part of attitudes that create attraction to populist agendas and ideologies. Emotions also play a role by allowing identification with a person of authority and power. This identification develops the person's ethnic identity and communication (Lilleker & Weidhase, 2021) or social identity. Aslanidis (2018) puts importance on the social identities that align with political ideologies. He revises the work of Tajfel (1974) when viewing social identity as a part of the person's self-concept. This part 'derives' from a person's 'knowledge' of their 'membership' in a social group. This membership is emotionally engaged because emotions respond to a social and political examination of ideology. This awakens identification with the ideology's representative, and furthermore, 'belonging' to a political party can occur. According to Vanessa Hirneis (2022),

belonging is the main reason for people to organise in groups. Widmann (2021) states that there is a specific set of emotions that populist parties operate under within the public space. There is an 'emotional appeal' that relates to the void people experience while looking for a national hero.

To some extent, cognition-emotion makes sense in regard to populism because it explains how people's emotions, perceptions, and identities are activated within social representations and how these representations respond mentally to the parties' agendas and rhetoric. Populism is also apparent in relation to the formation of social identity that makes people become drawn towards specific personalities and groups. However, it is unknown where the emotions facilitating the group's identification come from, why identification is a complex process, and why, as such, it relates to a person's sense of who they are and where they belong.

Another moment that the literature does not address is what develops the sense for someone to identify with a political figure and vote for them. According to Forgas et al. (2021), behavioural explanations of populism relate to specific formed motivations around voting, use of persuasive strategies, and motivational speeches. This leads to questions about what internal processes people experience so that they identify with a populist figure and vote for them. In other words—what causes someone to be attracted and drawn to a particular person?

Large groups and populism

Populism can be related to the large-group psychology concept of 'us and them' (Volkan, 2009). Obradovic et al. (2020) describe 'us and them' as a 'classic social psychological division' (cited in Stathi & Guerra, 2021, p. 51) which creates social categorisation resulting in a specific intergroup dynamic facilitating opposition. This opposition is explained by Stathi and Guerra (2021) as a one of two 'distinct groups—the pure people versus the corrupt elite' (p. 51). However, social categorisation is a cognitive process. In this case, populism is a result of cognition forming a large-group behaviour around social differentiation and grouping on the basis of belonging and identification. When linked to belonging, Mudde and Rovira Kaltwasser (2017) defined populism as a 'thin-centred ideology' (as cited in Obradovic et al., 2020, p. 125) that has a 'folkloric style' of politics (Mudde & Rovira Kaltwasser, 2017). This is a foundation of the right-wing nationalistic populism with a set of ideas that makes the divide between 'us and them' visible. This mobilises large groups through belief systems related to the political right and left. In this case, psychological explanations of populism have an important role in looking for ways to explore large-group implicit processes. However, they engage with the cognitive-behavioural interplay between the social and psychological, focusing on intergroup dynamics, social identification, and polarisation and mobilisation of emotions. This shows cognition results in behaviour within a social context which a large group experiences in a moment of time.

Questions remain about what causes this identification in order to polarise into 'us and them', where these emotions come from, and what drives the attention of the voters towards particular political leaders and parties that use predominantly nationalistic and patriotic propaganda. Further questions occur around whether the vote for these populist figures is rational or if it is a result of mobilised emotions, or if the vote is a result of objective evaluation of facts or a subjective set of beliefs that feed a political party program.

The work of Erisen et al. (2021) explores the attitudinal and behavioural factors linked to psychological determinants of populism. There is a focus on psychological drivers such as the presence of 'trust vs. mistrust'. This has its cognitive side. However, when and how this mistrust was conditioned in a large group, and how it directs or becomes a driver, requires more in-depth study. Erisen et al. (2021) extend the common cognitive and behavioural studies on populism by looking at empirical research on personality traits, uncertainty, and avoidance within the country context. They also seek answers about whether a country's uncertainty, crises, or any other complicated event may be a reason for activating basic survival instincts among the population. These survival instincts may form a specific set of thoughts for seeking control, security, and order. These thoughts can draw the large group towards popular figures that mobilise a system of beliefs and emotions, including rescuing, saving, and protecting, in order for the large group to 'take the control back' (Martin & Berrocal, 2022, p. 98). This may lead to a preference for leaders that have father-like characteristics, displaying masculine traits within their protective saving-the-country-from-evil rhetoric that contains strong national and patriotic sentiments. However, what is the mechanism that influences people's cognition of decision making and people's behaviour of voting for a populist figure? What is the reason that people look for a leader and a father figure in one person?

As discussed, the psychological literature offers more cognition- and behaviour-based psychological explanations and not much explanation of psychoanalysis. Recognising the strong connection between cognition, emotions, and behaviour does not seem enough. Specifically, recognising what type of emotions the populist parties operate under within the public space and where they come from requires more in-depth understanding. Both political and psychological literature demonstrate the presence of a logical link between cognition, emotion, and behaviour with identity and belonging in people's experience of populism.

What unites cognition, beliefs, behaviours, belonging, identity, and emotions is the concept of transference. This directs discussions towards reasons for why people become drawn to a particular person and if this is because of charisma or if there is a deeper unseen cause. The psychoanalytic lens illuminates an unconscious reason regarding the dynamic between them. Often, this reason is an internal desire that, in the view of the group, can only be fulfilled by one person.

In summary, particular attitudes and emotions start to be played out by a large group around urges of identification and belonging. When any crises occur, individuals and groups act out their internal survival instinct, having the need to feel safe. Therefore, survival and safety are the two existential demands a large group starts to respond to when feeling under threat. The father figure comes to fulfil these two existential needs, which create cognitions, beliefs, emotions, and behaviours. The greater the ability of meeting these needs that is demonstrated in an individual, the more a large group has potential to desire a father rather than a leader during moments of crisis. Then, all factors, strategies, and tactics can be played out very well by any populist figure through sensing the large group's wants and the cultural particularities that the large group operates within. At that point, transferring large-group feelings from the past to the present can occur.

THE BULGARIAN STYLE OF POPULISM

Anna Krasteva (2016) charts the start of populism in Bulgaria in the 21st century when there was an important change from 'party' to 'symbolic' politics. Krasteva explains this transition based on the establishment of 'fragile' democracy in the country in the 1990s. Extremist parties appeared and became successful during 'severe economic crisis' and 'political instability' (Krasteva, 2016, p. 165). What could be observed during these challenges was the lack of trust, political and social crisis, the vast personification in politics, and national rhetoric with strong patriotic elements. Krasteva reports that back in 2006 the first Bulgaria populist figure, Volen Siderov, achieved the 'highest ever' result not only for his party, but for him personally (Krasteva, 2016). This starts to map and define the presence of the Other and 'identity' politics.

Krasteva (2016) also discusses grouping factors as internal and external. External factors are the rise of globalisation and a change in the global economy during which Bulgaria struggled to find its place. Internal factors, on the other side, include the attitudes resulting from the opposition 'communism–democracy' that established new divisions of left and right. This facilitated the growth of perceptions around 'disregarding people' for the benefits of the corrupted politicians and the struggle for the country's geopolitical representation. Additionally, a political competition was entrenched on the basis of a personalised 'identity' rather than on ideological projects with a clear political program. Everything was media-managed, which played a role in cognitively forming two Bulgarian national mental images—one for a leader and another for the country itself. This was expressed through the examination of the personal charismatic traits, examination of power, 'de-ideologisation', and 'people-lisation' of the whole reality and public sphere. However, the development of Bulgarian national populism did not stop there because emotions were involved.

Anna Krasteva (2016) acknowledges the presence of a 'fear' because of 'overproduction of othering' (p. 179) in the form of enemies. This goes alongside protection, coming from the church as a symbol of religion, Bulgarian folklore, and Bulgarian identity (perceived in its ideal form). This picture has its nationalistic and patriotic elements, but it needed someone to navigate it. Krasteva (2016) sees 'family–religion–nation' bringing historical and predominantly 'unifying' content in Bulgarian populism, which makes sense with Bulgaria being a collective culture. The unity aims to establish a feeling of 'belonging to' and being 'part of something big' that aims to bring the nation into its 'organic whole' (Krasteva, 2016, p. 188). National populism is accompanied by patriotic attitudes crystalising into the idea that 'Great Bulgaria will prosper as never before!'. The attitudes are navigated through the dichotomy of the 'pure people–the corrupted elites' as Ostiguy (2017) and Martin and Berrocal (2022) describe.

Krasteva (2016) points out that Bulgarian national populism has its radical form because there is 'absence' of a well-developed democratic stance. Because Bulgarians struggle to understand their form of political governance, they look for potential leaders with whom to identify. In the view of Krasteva, this is because there is a change from socialism to nationalism and from 'ideological to identity' politics that provide 'social cohesion' in Bulgaria (p. 163). This results in one person being perceived as a leader because they become the provider for Bulgarian desires; the protector and the long-awaited national hero that can unify the nation by giving safety, comfort, security, and belonging in moments of crisis. What Krasteva additionally sees is a form of 'togetherness' that Bulgarians desperately try to achieve through finding somebody that can lead and unite them in the name of Bulgaria.

In conclusion, the fear, instability, personalisation of politics, presence of the Other, and the desire for unity paved the way for a large group's search for protection, security, and organisation of the Bulgarian reality. Using a discursive, culturally designed strategy led to the transfer of father-like characteristics onto the perceived consumption of populism by the Bulgarian large group.

TRANSFERENCE IN LITERATURE

The definition of transference comes from Freud (1912) in his work 'Dynamics of Transference'. The concept explains a repeated stereotyped pattern of early life expressed impulses embedded in human development. These impulses are directed towards reality in forms of mental functions, cognition, emotions, and affects. They are projected from the past onto someone in the present. Transference begins early in life through the interaction with any parent figure.

Sigmund Freud was the first to form the concept after observing his patients falling in love with him by idealising him. He observed presence of an unconscious load playing a role in this

idealisation. As a result, patients related to him as a figure of significance that a parent figure from their past had. His clients were transferring some parent figure's emotions, images, thoughts, and feelings from their past onto him into the present in the therapy room.

Transference is mainly used in therapeutic settings and within the therapist–client relationship. It addresses a redirecting of the inner feelings and desires towards someone else. However, the patient transfers feelings within a therapeutic setting. This puts conditions on the transferring process. Applied to the social context, conditions may explain why a large group feels drawn towards a specific person who has the power to operate with the group's emotions in a certain time and space.

Scholars argue that transference occurs every day, even though the main research on it comes from the area of therapeutic studies. Transference happens in human daily communication in situations of judgements perceived from others, but originates from a judgemental parent being overprotective towards a child. In a working environment, an employer incorporates authority and power, but also indirectly provides security and protection in the form of a salary. The worker may mimic the behaviour they had with parents as the child's authority figures. Expecting to be looked after is already a feeling that is formed in the past, based on the received parental care in childhood. This acknowledges the presence of emotions, beliefs, behaviours, and self-identity that stem from childhood, but that are applied to present social contexts.

Beyond the therapeutic field

There is literature around 'transference and populism' within the field of psychotherapy. It relates to group psychotherapy. Transference is a concept that is discussed within group analysis, but not beyond that. When looking at why leaders are followed, Michael Maccoby (2004) makes a clear link between leadership and transference, resulting from the Freudian realisations about his clients. He discusses transference related to the choice of a leader in the business context. Maccoby suggests the presence of 'irrational followers' whose irrationalism is explained by being outside of their awareness, which questions rationality and control. Maccoby sees motivations arise from the powerful unconscious images and emotions. They are projected onto relationships with leaders. For Freud, these motivations may be the result of reproduced infantile stereotypes.

The psychotherapist Arno Remmers (2023) provides further clarity. This reproduction of stereotypes takes place in early interactions that become unconsciously projected. This is why transference includes repressed expectations, fears, longings, desires, experiences, 'drive impulses, relationship needs and patterns and interaction stereotypes' (Remmers, 2023, p. 76).

Maccoby (2004) gives examples of the worker–employer relationship where employees' transferential expectations exist (Maccoby, 2004). For Freud, this occurred with his patients.

When applied to large groups, this becomes the group's transferential expectations. In a political context, these expectations are transferred to a large group's (party, nation, country) leader. They become the foundation of a large group—the leader's relationship is the social element in the process of transferring.

In a new way of interpreting the 'Dynamics of Transference', Almond (2011) concludes that an individual's transference is 'interactional'. The reason is that transference is more associated with social connections that have 'energetic investment'; an individual's sense of 'satisfaction, frustration, fixations and defence' (Almond, 2011, p. 1134). Even though transference is not related to a particular 'prototype', both Freud and Almond talk about this energetic and emotionally loaded investment coming from the 'father' or 'mother' image.

When referring to the leader, Almond addresses the view of Max Weber about 'charisma', suggesting that certain powerful, sometimes unexpected, behaviours by the leader evoke strong emotions and reactions (Almond, 2011). This becomes the first time when transference is applied within a social and political context outside the therapy room. The charisma and direction of a large group's emotions are two psychological mechanisms behind populism that influence large-group choice in voting. This has been strengthened by contemporary tools—social media and television. The use of digital technologies helps to direct the group's emotions, and this results in what Mihelj and Jiménez-Martínez (2021) see as a reason in the recent rise of populism. This is the ability to provoke and deepen a large group's 'national sentiments'. This encourages 'tribal forms of nationalism' during political events (Mihelj & Jiménez-Martínez, 2021, p. 332).

The group's transference

Earl Hopper's work addresses transference in groups. Hopper (2006) claims that transference can occur between participants, and from the group's members to the group's conductor. In addition to this idea, Kraus et al. (2010) explain that transference occurs when the figure of a significant other is activated and applied to a 'target person'. The 'significant other' refers to a parent. This figure shapes how humans interact with others during the transferring process.

According to Kraus et al. (2010), transference is about thinking, feeling, and acting towards the other, considering them as the significant one. In a Lacanian context, this indicative 'other' refers to power and social constructs. By exploring the actual mechanisms of the transferential process, Klaus et al. (2010) explain that transference occurs when the significant other is given inferential power and 'emotional significance'. This significance has also 'cognitive material' (Klaus et al., 2010, p. 2). Therefore, cognitions, emotions, and behaviour appear as the main components of transference. They also explain the experience of populism. The image of the significant other is activated in the face of a populist leader. Once they know how to operate with the cognitive and emotional material, they can navigate the social and political processes. This becomes evident in the work of Lobont (2009), who unfolds transference in application to genocide. In particular, negative transference is present

in hostile emotions of 'unconscious past origins', and many 'destructive energies' are channelled (Lobont, 2009, p. 27).

Towards transference in large groups

Because populism conceptually engages with ideology and discursive strategy for large groups in terms of their political choices, there is a need to define the large group first.

A large group is a group formed of 'tens or hundreds of thousands or millions of persons' (Volkan, 2009, p. 206) that share psychological processes. This leads to three suggestions. Firstly, the large group as a concept does not constantly cover an entire population, but those who choose a particular person as a leader during a particular time. An example is the large group of 41.5% of voters aged between 18 and 30 who voted for the TV presenter in the 2021 Bulgarian election (Nikolov, 2021). Secondly, because time and circumstances change, a large group may change too, by content, or by increasing or decreasing. Thirdly, a large group may have different social characteristics, such as age, gender, and occupation.

Volkan (2013) mentions transference when explaining large-group traumatic societal responses. He states that there is a 'transferential figure' (p. 139) who plays as a 'symbol'. This symbol unconsciously represents a parent figure who speaks for the large-group identity. Volkan gives an example of some parental figures, such as John Kennedy and Martin Luther King, that consolidate a sense of identification and belonging. Transference in a large group explains this consolidation as a process of moving emotional material from the large group's unconscious onto the perceived 'significant other' who is an 'idealized oedipal father' (Volkan, 2024, p. 346). When the unconscious interplays with national desires, voids, and sentiments, then large-group transference occurs. Because these feelings can be manifested in a form of populism within a leader–follower relationship, large groups can swallow propaganda (Volkan, 2020). Such propaganda includes 'taking back control', which is central to populist narratives in moments of helplessness (Martin & Berrocal, 2022).

Applying Volkan's explanation of what a transferential figure is, transference to a leader is then the logical explanation of how populism takes place. The transferential figure characterises populism as emotionally charged political appeals to address crises through 'neonationalism, masculine... phantasmatic ethnic golden-ageism' (Gagnon et al., 2018, p. 6). When one country's crises are considered, collective emotions are mobilised and combined with nationalistic attitudes. They form a way of transferring unconscious group feelings. The social, political, and historical context of the crises form the set of conditions under which transference is performed by a large group. These specific conditions create the climate for something to unconsciously trigger the large group's instinct. There is a collective mind that comes to light. Large-group behaviour reveals the presence of unconscious drives that lead to identification with a person who can meet the group desires. However, conditions are played out in a world of relationships and communication. Lacan (2013) calls this world the

'Symbolic Order'. In it, law, culture, and society control human desires and ways of communication. This is explained by the concept 'on-the-name-of-the-father'.

THE SYMBOLIC WHERE TRANSFERENCE ENDURES

The Symbolic Order for Lacan is the social reality in which people live. It is organised accordingly with the type of culture and society. It also echoes the historical period and context that facilitates processes for individuals and groups. In the Symbolic, humans work with language, rules, structure, manners, norms, and values. The Symbolic is also the field where conformity to the law and regulations takes place. Communication, media, and language is also part of it. They foster specific interpretations of reality because they provide coordination and articulation of human experience about self, identity, group and groupings, social relations, etc. Therefore, in the context of groups, the Symbolic facilitates a specific interaction through which groups respond to symbols and elements with specific meaning. Hence, the Symbolic influences the large group's unconscious.

Symbolic interactionism explains how every society is constructed through its members' interpretations (Carter & Fuller, 2015). This suggests having a uniqueness in the meanings of things. Making, having, and communicating meaning depends on language, culture, history, and the use of the group's symbols (in linguistic or physical form). These symbols can be in the form of a national character. For instance, these can be national flags, anthems, national songs and stories, as well as some words from the group's language that may have specific meaning for the group's existence. When these are used, then the group's interaction is directed, navigated, and managed symbolically. However, these symbols can also become triggers for the group's unconscious material (images and emotions) to come to the surface and be transferred into a person that represents the group's Symbolic.

When transference within already formed social interaction takes place, the symbols mentioned can give more importance to certain ideologies, beliefs, and people, and less importance to others. Examples come from the value of the monarch in Great Britain and the value that a president has in republics such as France, Poland, Russia, Slovakia, Bulgaria, etc. The value comes from the type of culture (individualist or collectivist) and the political form of governance each county has. It is part of their specific Symbolic Order and interaction with the established specific meaning each country has. Therefore, types of politicians may rise to power responding to cultural values. In this sense, every large group that comes from a different country and culture may become drawn to a leader who is able to come to power exactly within a nationally and culturally particular Symbolic Order because of the established intersubjective relations within. These relations are navigated by large groups and political leaders through using national language, proverbs with cultural and historical meanings, folklore, places for gathering, laws, regulations, and ideological conventions. All these keep

the large group together by empowering the sense of belonging. Relations are expressed as a collective action through activities such as voting, striking on the street, or taking part in referendums.

Humans accept the Symbolic reality in the 'name-of-the-father' (Lacan, 2013). In Lacanian meaning this refers to cultural and social order; learning it in the family and practicing it in society. Examples can be commonly spread family traditions, disciplining practices, and parents' ideologies. All of them bring some type of control applied to the external world. When the family is established within a specific culture or society, then it is likely to practice repeated patterns. They are navigated by the society's rules. Large groups formed in this society also follow the same rules. They have familiarity of childhood experiences. So, they will know the 'name-of-the-father' in its specific cultural and social way. They will also react to the one who is able to manage the order so it meets the large group's needs and desires.

One basic need is safety. It comes with an order. For a large group, social factors (what others do, say, and how one relates to others) influence judgement of safety and direct decisions about it (Eller & Frey, 2019). The feeling of safety in a large group within any context comes with a secure base. This is provided by the father's support in a child's daily play (Grossman & Grossman, 2019). The father as a child's playmate provides a training ground; so, he can be regarded as the established Symbolic structure during interactions. In this, Lacan (1954, 1955, 1988) sees transference taking place.

According to Derek Hook (2016), the leader is to 'make the function of the father work' (p. 114) in the Symbolic. This is because the leader introduces order to human relations. They are symbolically implicit, but physically explicit. Because they are present in the physical, they are able to reconstruct, re-articulate, and re-order (Hook, 2016) the Symbolic to match with what is current. This may happen by bringing new meanings and vocabulary to present explanations. They can also re-form the context of what is going on in the life of a large group during a particular moment in time. Therefore, the 'name-of-the-father' is the big Other that functions as a father to provide safety. An illustration of this father is the idea of God. In all religions, he is in a masculine form and has the power and authority to navigate people's experience by bringing rules and meanings. In politics, this father is the leader.

According to Gagnon et al. (2018), a populist can be an individual or a political party or organisation that adopts a certain style of 'behaviour, discursive frame, or thin ideology' (Gagnon et al., 2018, p. 12). In 2021, the events in Bulgaria put the country into another crisis about power, with failures at a European level, a poor economy, and low voting turnout. During this political cataclysm, the country was crying out for a new leader and a new future. Bulgarians lived in symbolic chaos rather than symbolic order at that time, with three elections in one year (Todorov, 2021). Considering Bulgaria as a collective culture that has 'we' as the centre of its existence (Ivanov, 2010), Bulgarian hopes for stability, security, unity, and a new beginning were at their peak.

It took one experienced singer and TV presenter to respond to the hopes and re-order the social reality for Bulgarians so that they would start acting in the 'name-of-the-father'. Trifonov presented a discursive frame that delivered not only a thin-ideology, but also a thin-management of collective emotions around the country's past and future. He was described as going 'from being a political novice to a kingmaker' of the 2021 Bulgarian election (Prince, 2021a, para. 6). He became the 'significant other' in pushing out the long-standing government of Boiko Borisov that was linked with corruption. Trifonov was 'chipping away' at the popularity of Borisov for long time before the election (Prince, 2021b), demonstrating anti-system behaviour and a protective role over Bulgaria and Bulgarians. Moreover, he protected and cherished all the attributes or symbols of Bulgaria-ness such as folklore, history, music, religion, young people, and the large-group identity. He had made a great symbiosis between acting, singing, speaking, presenting, making fun, and making business for the last 20 years in the Bulgarian Symbolic Order. This demonstrated his incredible style of behaviour by mixing the role of facilitator, protector, and presenter of Bulgarian stories, representing reality in his own way. He managed to fill the Bulgarian void by offering a populist narrative and was consistently responding to the Bulgarian large group's desires.

CONCLUSION

Transference occurs in the sphere of the Symbolic that provides instruments for navigation, the triggers, and the people that can facilitate it. The choice of a leader comes under the 'name-of-the-father' because of cognitive and emotional causes that manifest in particular large-group behaviours. The example in this article demonstrates how transference legitimises one person's populist ideology during a large group's search for security, safety, and certainty in situations when fear and anger are cultivated feelings.

'The father' is a mental idea. It is a representation of emotions combined with thoughts and expectations. The father manifests in the physical form in the face of popular figures who display protective characteristics. They exhibit skills of navigating the Symbolic Order with its national particularities at times of instability. What people transfer is the mental picture with the underlined emotions in an ideal expectation of what their leader should be. This mental idea contains a set of expectations, ideas, abilities, and qualities that the large group desires their leader to have. Transference takes place according to the common goal of a collective culture. This explains the presence of national populism in it.

When the culture is collective as it is in the Bulgarian case, large groups may identify with a specific theme (cultural aspect), such as unity or togetherness, that is represented by a leader for the specific time period on a strong nationalistic and patriotic basis. With the application of national particularities such as history, politics, and culture, this becomes a form of national populism. This can facilitate certain thoughts and emotions around which a

discursive frame can be formed. Then, transference is able to situate the large group to act out of emotional connection rather than logical evaluation. Hence, it can be concluded that the Bulgarian large group shows signs of emotional, rather than logical, voting. Then, any populist leader that promises order, protection, safety, and security may become a transferential figure, taking on a large group's unconsciously transferred father-like characteristics, expectations, and idealisations.

Not all large groups will transfer the same emotions and have the same triggers during the same circumstances. That is why large groups from collectivist cultures should be studied separately from individualist ones because case studies from each can provide observations of patterns, if any, and explain modern dictatorship, fascism, and other extreme behavioural tendencies.

The Bulgarian case demonstrates that there are internal invisible driving forces that make a large group feel drawn towards particular figures at certain times. In this sense, the article opens a door for more research and explanations about what, who, and how transference occurs in different cultures so that a particular form of populism materialises within a large group. The need for psychoanalysis to be applied outside of the therapy room becomes inevitable in order to not only explain what takes place in the large group's unconscious, but also to help provide a potential way or mechanisms for healing.

REFERENCES

Almond, R. (2011). Reading Freud's 'the dynamics of transference' one hundred years later. *Journal of the American Psychoanalytic Association*, *59*(6), 1129–1156. https://doi.org/10.1177/0003065111428982

Appleton, T. (2023). *A Lacanian conception of populism: Society does not exist*. Routledge

Aslanidis, P. (2018). The social psychology of populism. In A. Ron & M. Nadesan (Eds.), *Mapping populism: Approaches and methods* (pp. 166–174). Routledge.

Carral, U., Tuñón, J., & Elías, C. (2023). Populism, cyberdemocracy and disinformation: analysis of the social media strategies of the French extreme right in the 2014 and 2019 European elections. *Humanities & Social Sciences Communications*, *10*, 23. https://doi.org/10.1057/s41599-023-01507-2

Carter, M. J., & Fuller, C. (2015). Symbolic interactionism. *Sociopedia.isa*.

Eller, E., & Frey, D. (2019). Psychological perspectives on perceived safety: Social factors of feeling safe. In M. Raue, B. Streicher, E. Lermer (Eds.), *Perceived safety: A multidisciplinary perspective* (pp. 43-60). Springer. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-11456-5_4

Erisen, C., Guidi, M., Martini, S., Toprakkiran, S., Isernia, P., & Littvay, L. (2021). Psychological correlates of populist attitudes. *Political Psychology*, *42*(S1), 149–171. https://doi.org/10.1111/pops.12768

EU Commission. (2020, January 27). *The corruption perception index 2019: The EU is the best performer in the world.* https://ec.europa.eu/regional_policy/en/newsroom/news/2020/01/27-01-2020-the-corruption-perception-index-2019-the-eu-is-the-best-performer-in-the-world

Forgas J. P., Crano, D. W., & Fiedler, K. (2021). *The psychology of populism: The tribal challenge to liberal democracy*. Routledge.

Freud, S. (1912). The dynamics of transference. In *The standard edition of the complete psychological works of Sigmund Freud, Volume XII (1911-1913). The case of Schreber, papers on technique and other works* (pp. 97–110). Hogarth Press.

Freud, S. (1921). Group psychology and the analysis of the ego. In *The standard edition of the complete psychological works of Sigmund Freud, Volume XVIII (1920–1922): Beyond the pleasure principle* (pp. 65–144). Hogarth Press.

Gagnon, J., Beausoleil, E., Son, K., Arguelles, C., Chalaye, P., & Johnston, C. N. (2018). What is populism? Who is the populist?: A state of the field review (2008–2018). *Democratic Theory*, *5*(2), vi–xxvi. https://doi.org/10.3167/dt.2018.050201

Grossman, K., & Grossman, K. (2019). Essentials when studying child–father attachment: A fundamental view on safe haven and secure base phenomena. *Attachment and Human Development*, *22*(1), 9–14. https://doi.org/10.1080/14616734.2019.1589056

Hirneis, V. (2022, May 3). *The psychology of populism: Why are Europe and the West moving to the right?* LSE. https://blogs.lse.ac.uk/psychologylse/2022/05/03/the-psychology-of-populism-why-are-europe-and-the-west-moving-to-the-right/

Hook, D. (2016). What, for Lacan, makes the function of the father work? Of Abraham and the goat, or, of Elliott and ET [Book review]. *Psychology in Society*, *51*, 113–116. http://dx.doi.org/10.17159/2309-8708/2016/n51a9

Hopper, E. (2006). Theoretical and conceptual notes concerning transference and countertransference processes in groups and by groups, and the social unconscious, part 1. *Group Analysis*, *39*(4), 549–559. https://doi.org/10.1177/0533316406071453

Ivanov, P. (2010). *Applied social psychology: Part 1* (3rd ed.). Ahat.

Kaysel, A., & Mussi, D. (2022). Francisco Weffort and the dependency theory: Populism, class, and nation. *Latin American Perspectives*, *49*(1), 91–106. https://doi.org/10.1177/0094582X211052016

Krasteva, A. (2016). The post-communist rise of national populism: Bulgarian paradoxes. In G. Lazaridis, G. Campani, & A. Benveniste (Eds.), *The rise of the far right in Europe: Populist shifts and othering* (pp. 161–200). Palgrave.

Kraus, M. W., Chen, S., Lee, V. A., & Straus, L. D. (2010). Transference occurs across group boundaries. *Journal of Experimental Social Psychology*, *46*(6), 1067–1073. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jesp.2010.05.003

Lacan, J. (1954). *Livre I: Les écrits techniques de Freud, 1953–1954* [The seminar of Jacques Lacan: Book 1: Freud's papers on technique 1953–1954 1st Edition] (J.-A. Miller, Ed.). Éditions du Seuil.

Lacan, J. (1955). *Livre II: Le moi dans la théorie de Freud et dans la technique de la psychanalyse, 1954–1955* [The ego in Freud's theory and in the technique of psychoanalysis, 1954–1955] (J.-A. Miller, Ed.). Éditions du Seuil.

Lacan, J. (1988). *The Seminar. Book I. Freud’s Papers on Technique, 1953–54* (J. Forrester, Trans.). Cambridge University Press.

Lacan, J. (2013). *On the names-of-the-father* (B. Fink, Trans.) Polity Press.

Lilleker, D.G., & Weidhase, N. (2022). The psychology of populism. In M. Oswald (Ed.), *The Palgrave handbook of populism* (pp. 103–114). Palgrave Macmillan. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-80803-7_6

Lobont, F. (2009). Freud's concept of transference and modern genocide. *Revista de Psihologie Aplicată*, *11*(1), 27–30. https://www.rjap.psihologietm.ro/Download/rjap111_4.pdf

Maccoby, M. (2004). *Why people follow the leader: The power of transference*. Behavioural Science, Harvard Business Review. https://hbr.org/2004/09/why-people-follow-the-leader-the-power-of-transference

Manolov, R. (2021, April 19). *Slavi Trifonov: Bulgaria's miracle worker*. EURACTIV Bulgaria. https://www.euractiv.com/section/all/news/slavi-trifonov-bulgarias-miracle-worker/

Marinov, N., & Popova, M., (2021, April 13). *The 2021 Bulgarian election: A 'QAnon turn' for Eastern European politics?* London School of Economics. https://blogs.lse.ac.uk/europpblog/2021/04/13/the-2021-bulgarian-election-a-qanon-turn-for-eastern-european-politics/

Martin, D. O., & Berrocal, A. (2022). Nobody can trust or believe anything: Brexit, populism, and digital politics. *Dilemata: International Journal of Applied Ethics*, *38*, 83–102. https://www.dilemata.net/revista/index.php/dilemata/article/view/412000483

Mihelj, S., & C. Jimenez-Martinz. (2021). Digital nationalism: Understanding the role of digital media in the rise of 'new' nationalism. *Nations and Nationalism*, *27*(2), 331–346. https://doi.org/10.1111/nana.12685

Mouffe, C. (2005). The 'end of politics' and the challenge of right-wing populism. In F. Panizza (Ed.), *Populism and the mirror of democracy* (pp. 72-98). Verso.

Mouffe, C. (2018). *For a left populism*. Verso.

Mudde, C. (2004). The populist zeitgeist. *Government and Opposition*, *39*(4), 541–563. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1477-7053.2004.00135.x

Mudde, C., & Rovira Kaltwasser, C. (2017). *Populism: A very short introduction*. Oxford University Press.

Nielsen, N. (2016, January 27). *Bulgaria seen as most corrupt in EU.* EU Observer. https://euobserver.com/justice/132012

Nikolov, K. (2021, July 9). *Slavi the showman in pole position in Bulgarian election race*. EURACTIV Bulgaria. https://www.euractiv.com/section/elections/news/slavi-the-showman-in-pole-position-in-bulgarian-election-race/

Obradović, S., Power, S.A., & Skeffington, J-A. (2020). Understanding the psychological appeal of populism. *Current Opinion in Psychology*, *35*, 125–131. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.copsyc.2020.06.009

Ostiguy, P. (2017). Populism: A socio-cultural approach. In C. Rovira Kaltwasser, P. Taggart, P. Ochoa Espejo, & P. Ostiguy (Eds.), *The Oxford handbook of populism* (pp. 73–98). Oxford University Press. https://doi.org/10.1093/oxfordhb/9780198803560.013.3

Prince, T. (2021a, April 3). *A Bulgarian showman could be the country's election kingmaker*. Radio Free Europe and Radio Liberty. https://www.rferl.org/a/bulgarian-elections-slavi-stanislav-trifonov-borisov/31184901.html

Prince, T. (2021b, July 11). *Bulgarian anti-elite party narrowly leading Borisov's GERB, exit polls show*. Radio Free Europe and Radio Liberty. https://www.rferl.org/a/bulgaria-election-borisov-corruption-gerb-trifonov/31352545.html

Remmers, A. (2023). Transference and countertransference. *The Global Psychotherapist*, *3*(1), 75–79. https://doi.org/10.52982/lkj183

Salgado, S. (2019). Where's populism? Online media and the diffusion of populist discourses and styles in Portugal. *European Political Science*, *18*, 53–65. https://doi.org/10.1057/s41304-017-0137-4

Singh, P. (2021). Populism, nationalism, and nationalist populism. *Studies in Comparative International Development*, *56*, 250–269. https://doi.org/10.1007/s12116-021-09337-6

Stathi, S., & Guerra, R. (2021). Unpacking the social psychology of populism: A brief introductory note. *Journal of Theoretical Social Psychology*, *5*(2), 50–53. https://doi.org/10.1002/jts5.98

Tajfel, H. (1974). Social identity and intergroup behavior. *Social Science Information*, *13*(2), 65–93. https://doi.org/10.1177/053901847401300204

Todorov, S. (2021, August 10). *Bulgaria edges closer to third election in a year*. Balkan Insight. https://balkaninsight.com/2021/08/10/bulgaria-edges-closer-to-third-election-in-a-year/

Tsanov, S. (2017). The 'Turkish Yoke' metaphor—A concept of Bulgarian national culture. *Proglas*, *26*(2), 255–261.

Urbinati, N. (2019). Political theory of populism. *Annual Review of Political Science*, *22*, 111–127. https://doi.org.10.1146/annurev-polisci-050317-070753

Volkan, V. D. (2009). Large-group identity, international relations and psychoanalysis. *International Forum of Psychoanalysis*, *18*(4), 206–213. https://doi.org/10.1080/08037060902727795

Volkan, V. D. (2013). *Enemies on the couch*. Pitchstone Publishing.

Volkan, V. D. (2020). *Large-group psychology: Racism, societal divisions, narcissistic leaders and who we are now*. Phoenix Publishing House.

Volkan, V. D. (2024). Large group identity, psychological borders, and unofficial diplomacy. *International Journal of Group Psychotherapy*, *73*(4), 336–349. https://doi.org/10.1080/00207284.2023.2290612

Weyland, K. (2021). Populism as a political strategy: An approach's enduring—and increasing—advantages. *Political Studies*, *69*(2), 185–189. https://doi.org/10.1177/00323217211002669

Widmann, T. (2020). How emotional are populists really? Factors explaining emotional appeals in the communication of political parties. *Political Psychology*, *42*(1), 163–181. https://doi.org/10.1111/pops.12693

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

This work is dedicated to the Director of Studies, Dr. AV on my PhD program at the University of East London, UK.

AUTHOR BIOGRAPHY

Yana Nikolova is a senior lecturer of Contemporary Social Psychology and Mental Health and Wellbeing at University of Northampton London and Anglia Ruskin University. She is also a PhD candidate of Psychosocial Studies at the University of East London, UK. Her working experience includes the fields of psychology and psychoanalysis, counselling and psychotherapy, and sociology and criminal behaviour.

Currently, she is working on her PhD thesis on everyday immigrant activities around expressing Bulgarian identities within the diaspora. This research uses innovative methodology that combines semi-structured interviews with immigrants with netnography through which immigrant online communities are observed within their own group's space. She has written on politics in the Balkans, psychology of the digital, and psychosocial studies. Some of Yana's recent contributions are in the area of large-group psychology, developed by Vamik Volkan, in which she contributes by exploring psychoanalytic concepts such as defences, transferences, traumas, and entitlement ideologies, providing case studies from Bulgaria which is her place of birth.

Psychotherapy and Politics International

2024, VOL. 22, NO. 1, 1–24
https://doi.org/10.24135/ppi.v22i1.04

Online ISSN: 1556-9195 Journal homepage: https://ojs.aut.ac.nz/psychotherapy-politics-international

PEER-REVIEWED ARTICLE

Troublesome boys, prison, and intimate partner violence

Seán Manning,*[1] **Dave Nicholls**,[1] and **Elizabeth Day**[1]
[1] Auckland University of Technology, Aotearoa New Zealand

ABSTRACT

This article uses developmental and philosophical notions derived from the work of de Beauvoir, Canguilhem, Foucault, Rose, Butler, and others to build a theory of what happens to the sense of self of young men in prison and establishes a connection between the experience of imprisonment and men's violence towards women. It is the second in a series exploring the development of a criminal subjectivity as a consequence of criminal justice systems, particularly imprisonment, which are designed to cope with the behaviour resulting from criminal identity, in an endless loop.

KEYWORDS: prison; violence; subjectification; punishment

A NOTE ON TERMINOLOGY

Throughout this article the terms 'prisoner' and 'inmate' are used interchangeably, depending on context, as these are terms recognised by people who are imprisoned or work in connection with prisons. The more correct term 'incarcerated people' feels clumsy in the setting of this work. Except where a proper name is concerned, the commonly used 'Aotearoa New Zealand' is adopted rather than the internationally better known 'New Zealand'. 'Aotearoa', usually translated as 'Long White Cloud', is the accepted name in the language of the indigenous people, the Māori. 'Pasifika' is a generic term referring to Polynesian Pacific Islanders, who make up about 8% of the population. 'Mana' is a commonly used Māori term, meaning integrity, prestige, charisma, jurisdiction.

*Contact details: sean-manning@xtra.co.nz

INCARCERATION AND ETHNICITY

There are strong links between marginalised ethnicity, poverty, offending, incarceration, and issues with alcohol and drugs. Justice Joe Williams, a member of the New Zealand Supreme Court, speaks about the way colonisation works over generations to maintain a state of dispossession that he links to indigenous offending (Williams, 2019). According to information provided to the writer by the New Zealand Department of Corrections | Ara Poutama Aotearoa, about 53% of prisoners are Māori, compared to 18% of the population (as at December 2021). Over the past four decades this figure has crept up from a low in 1983 of just over 42% and has been maintained between 52% and 53% over a period of dramatic reduction in prison numbers, which have declined overall by one-fifth in the four years since 2018.

BOYS GETTING INTO TROUBLE

This article focusses on a particular social process, the phenomenon of boys getting into trouble. Though it is controversial, common wisdom and some research evidence point to a gendered pattern of response to stress. Under similar circumstances, girls are diagnosed with anxiety disorders twice as much as boys (Narmandakh et al., 2021), and girls report suicide attempts twice as much as boys (Clark et al., 2013; Fleming et al., 2007), yet the suicide rate among boys in this country is reported as being up to four times that of girls (Fleming et al., 2007), with the rate for young Māori males being the highest (The New Zealand Youth Suicide Prevention Strategy, 2000).

Data like these suggest a pattern where young females are perhaps better at recognising and expressing emotional distress in non-lethal ways than boys. This may be a cultural phenomenon; a large Chinese study, for instance, reports the same rates of self-harm among young males and females (Li et al., 2020). Our patterns of imprisonment suggest that men get into a lot more trouble than women, even allowing for a bias in the way courts treat males and females. Jeffries (2001), in a doctoral thesis that studied 194 matched pairs of men and women appearing before a court on criminal charges, found that men typically received harsher sentences, driven by constructions of women as ‘dependent, emotional, and traumatised by victimisation’, while ‘such “troubles” appeared as simply unbelievable or irrelevant in the case of men’ (p. xii). This may contrast with a suspicious view of women appearing as victims of sexual assault, where the ‘weakness’ of women is seen as accompanied by a tendency for manipulative behaviour, while men are the victims of their own sexual urges. This would be congruent with the argument that boys are not expected to be responsible to the same extent as girls. Harsher sentencing, though, cannot explain the extreme differences between the numbers of male and female prisoners. In June 2022, there

were 7203 male and 427 female prisoners, a ratio of over sixteen to one (Department of Corrections | Ara Poutama Aotearoa, 2022).

In trying to make sense of this gendered picture, there is an idea suggested by Simone de Beauvoir (1949/2011) in her 1949 text *The Second Sex* that girls, but not boys, are 'prematurely integrated into the universe of the serious' (p. 310), meaning that they learn, in childhood, prior to pubescence, the serious business of a woman's role, from older females. From a young age children will often want to help, and from the age of 8 or 10, girls in particular are capable of performing complex chores very well. Along with this co-operative relationship, there is an easily observed style of conversation carried on between a girl and her mother, or aunt, or older sister or cousin, which deals with serious matters. Sitting in a café waiting for a friend, one sees across the room a woman of perhaps 40 or 50 talking with another of about 18 or 20. There is a resemblance in feature and gesture, suggesting relatedness, but it does not matter, it is a conversation between generations of women. While the younger woman is listening, she reaches across and picks some fluff from the older woman's sweater. In another scene, the 17-year-old daughter of a woman in her 40s helps her mother with makeup while they talk. In both cases the physical grooming behaviour could be reversed, and in both cases there is conversation concurrent with the behaviour. There is an intimacy here, and a dialogue, continuing over many encounters. Of course this is a generalisation, not all mother–daughter relationships conform to this pattern, but there is a pattern nevertheless, that de Beauvoir observed over 70 years ago, and which we seem to observe today.

There is a quality in this mother–daughter conversation that differs from parent–son talk, whether discussing issues of relationship, helping each other with hair and makeup, or exchanging clothing. It does not just cover topics related to a woman's role in a serious manner, but transmits both a way of being serious and a way of *seeing oneself being serious*, a self-image, an identity that is serious. Among the conversations, whatever the topic, there is a way of thinking and a way of *seeing oneself thinking*, a thinking subjectivity that is being transmitted, a gender-specific message, tumbling down the generations. In this way, as de Beauvoir (1949/2011) observes, a girl 'enters adolescence as an adult' (p. 310). The consequences of this gendered difference in role development can be seen in clinical practice. Clinicians, particularly in criminal justice settings, all have experience working with men whose lives are chaotic and who are looked after by women, while the reverse pattern is not seen so often.

In de Beauvoir's thesis, while girls develop in conversation about the real, boys tend to rely on mythical characters, images of great adventurous men who are seen as having shaped our world or performed remarkable feats, warriors, sportsmen, scientists, and particularly men who excel in a muscular fashion. The worship of male muscle is reinforced in practical ways. In Aotearoa New Zealand many women follow rugby football enthusiastically, and at the time of writing, the women's rugby team, the Black Ferns, has just won the women's rugby World

Cup, yet top male rugby players command salaries of up to a million dollars, while the more successful women are not paid a regular salary. Transparently, male muscle is worth more than its female counterpart. Male and female conversation forms itself differently. Again, risking stereotyping, for none of these observations is universal, we can suggest that, from prepubescence onwards, girls use words, boys use muscle.

When boys are impulsive and take risks, onlookers will comment, ‘Oh, I hope he is OK, but boys will be boys’. Our stance towards girls who take risks is quite different; we are much more worried, more judgemental, more diagnostic, ‘there is something wrong with her, she is out of control, she is in danger’. Among girls, there will be a tendency to dismiss boys as rather silly, inconsequential, or annoying figures. A boy is permitted, even expected, to be mischievous, to break rules, to get into trouble. We have an expectation (admittedly often confounded, though the experience of having it confounded confirms its discursive power) that girls will be more sensible, more thoughtful, more careful.

Perhaps using a 1949 text, albeit a classic of feminist writing, requires some justification. Of course, things have changed since de Beauvoir was writing, roles and gender identity can today be much more fluid. Many or most parents, being aware of the drawbacks in their own early training, will try to alter these patterns. There are close and affectionate relationships between brothers and sisters, and many boys will help in the household and develop a conversation with mother. I would suggest, however, that these non-heteronormative relationships exist alongside and complementary to older, more traditional patterns which still effectively produce impulsive boys and serious girls, particularly among people with a poorer level of educational and financial capital, among whom older role definitions persist.

Clearly this thesis is contentious. We are seeing the idea of gender changing radically. Since the early 1990s gender has been seen as performative (Butler, 1990, 2004) and fluid, and the importance of this fluidity has been acknowledged in psychoanalytic treatment (for instance, Kulish, 2010), and in the widespread increased attention paid to a person’s preferred pronouns (Krauthamer, 2021). There has been a dramatic increase in young women’s enrolment in tertiary education; in 2013, it was almost 50% higher than male enrolment in Aotearoa New Zealand, and was in the top 15% of OECD (Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development) countries in this respect (Figure.nz, 2013). There is a lot of popular literature based around this picture (for instance, Kristof, 2010), suggesting, in line with the educational data, that boys are relatively underperforming. We have seen the increasing involvement of women in government; the 2020 election returned a parliament of 48% women, which with by-elections has since become 50%, and at the time of writing women occupy a number of key posts, including Prime Minister, Governor General, and Chief High Court Judge.

Acknowledging that girls and women have to work through seemingly insurmountable obstacles to achieve equity in any public space, the numbers seem to reveal a relative decline in engagement by young men.

Yet despite all of these developments, as recently as 2016 a doctoral thesis looking at attitudes towards study and particularly towards maths among Aotearoa New Zealand schoolchildren finds that among the students from socially privileged backgrounds who aspire to higher status, graduate-entry jobs, it is still mainly boys who see themselves in high-paying technical occupations. Even well-resourced girls tend to prefer English to maths, and aim for the lower-status health and education jobs. Low socioeconomic status girls and Pasifika and Māori girls are most likely to aim for the lowest-status service sector jobs while their male equivalents tend to see themselves in manual occupations (Pomeroy, 2016). Enrolment and completion in tertiary study in Aotearoa New Zealand is still very dependent on the income and education of the student's parents, and there are marked ethnic disparities, with indigenous and Pasifika peoples dropping out more than people with European heritage (Meehan et al., 2019). Although women have made inroads into the 'trades', traditionally male occupations like plumbing and building, they still face barriers, and their numbers are not increasing quickly (Cruickshank, 2014).

This literature tells a story of how gendered role development is inextricably tied to financial, cultural, and educational capital. As one local study puts it,

> Those who are poor are much less healthy, have lower life expectancy, lack adequate housing, are over-represented in the prison population, and are more often the victims and the perpetrators of violence. Educational inequality is therefore one part of wider social inequality. (Snook & O'Neill, 2010, p. 5)

Pomeroy (2016) points to a *horizontal* gendered expectation, even within populations that are well resourced with money and education, such that girls still aim for more practical, lower status work, and also to a *vertical* exclusion that creates a 'physical discursive positioning of Māori and Pacific people within post-colonial discourses… the way SES [socioeconomic status], ethnicity, and gender position students in relation to the Cartesian *mind/body* binary' (p. 210). Indigenous and poorer people tend to position themselves in relation to physical work, and higher status, richer, ethnically European people and particularly men see themselves in more intellectual terms.

We can deduce from these kinds of data that we are more likely to see changes in gendered expectations in privileged sectors of the population, but even there, new patterns of gendered ambition are slow to develop. We also will expect that young men who get into serious trouble, as evidenced from the prison population, are more likely to come from lower income families and to be Māori or Pasifika. (By 'trouble', I mean behaving in ways that bring approbation and the possibility of punishment, breaching a consensual norm, violating a discourse about what is proper and acceptable.) We will expect that an older discourse

regarding gendered roles will operate among them, and among the women in their lives, that de Beauvoir's formulation will still be valid. We can expect, and tend to see, that young men who get into trouble will not have had access to the kind of conversation that is observed with girls and young women, and thus will have limited ways of expressing distress, as the data quoted above illustrate.

Suppose we imagine a population of young men, say mid- to late-teens, and we make a picture of what we call a 'normal distribution', the kind of diagram known as a 'bell curve' due to its shape. At one end of our imaginary distribution, we have a group of young men who never get into trouble. Their numbers are probably small, but they certainly exist. In the middle we have the bulk of this population, consisting of boys who get into some trouble, who may face disciplinary measures at school, who may get into fights, drink alcohol, and who sometimes injure themselves. Mostly they will be expected to 'grow out of it', to find sanctioned outlets for their energy. At the other end of our population distribution, we have young men who get into a lot to trouble, who are a real worry to their communities. These are not just in trouble at school, they will, increasingly with age, come to the attention of the authorities. The first group do not cause us much anxiety, unless we worry about boys who are too 'good'. Those in the middle group worry us at times, but mostly we can see their recklessness as a 'phase' and expect them eventually become more stable in their identities and be better able to navigate social processes in ways with which we are comfortable, although there is evidence from research on theory of mind and the development of empathy that they do so more slowly than young women (Andrews et al., 2021; Hu et al., 2010), which, again, following de Beauvoir's narrative, is what we would expect to see.

HOW THOSE AT ONE END OF A NORMAL DISTRIBUTION BECOME THE ENEMY: THE EMERGENCE OF A DISCOURSE ON CRIMINALITY

The cohort of young men at the extreme of the population curve who are in a lot of serious trouble tend to frighten us. We fear, and there may indeed exist, a deliberate intention in many cases of criminal violence, including violence toward intimate partners, to threaten, to make the other feel fear, to undermine their sense of safety, their ownership, their 'dominion', as retributivist theories of punishment describe it (Mascarenhas, 2021). This may become more so after a certain development in which a young man who is otherwise not possessed of a coherent sense of identity achieves it by experiencing the power to make another afraid (Manning, 1995, 1997; Manning & Nicholls, 2020). The point is well stated by de Beauvoir (1949/2011):

> The male has recourse to his fists and fighting when he encounters any affront or attempt to reduce him to an object: he does not let himself be transcended by others… an anger or a revolt that does not exert itself in muscles remains imaginary… for the adolescent boy who is allowed

> to manifest himself imperiously, the universe has a totally different face from what it has for the adolescent girl whose feelings are deprived of immediate effectiveness. (pp. 354–355)

This is a way of formulating a kind of template for an imbalance in power that is played out in intimate partner violence. One can hypothesise the cultural nature of such a power imbalance (for instance, Vandello & Cohen, 2008), or one can attribute it to endogenous, hormonal factors (Batrinos, 2012), or one can suggest an epigenetic hypothesis in which a propensity for violence is switched on by childhood adversity (Caspi et al., 2002). Whatever aetiology we adopt, de Beauvoir's lyrical style places the pattern in a narrative, which is what is needed for us to relate helpfully to both victim and perpetrator. In contrast to this narrative perspective, however, it often seems that news media will amplify a discourse based on fear.

At the time of writing, there has been a series of articles in popular media about robberies in which a stolen vehicle is driven through the window of a retail business. The perpetrators are thought to be young men, so there are headlines such as, 'Is youth crime really a growing problem and what can be done about it?' (Doyle, 2022). This title is illustrative of bias—the first question is implicitly answered in the positive, since one would not otherwise ask the second. In fact, data referred to in another report (Walters, 2022) illustrate a dramatic *reduction* in reported youth crime (Ministry of Justice, 2021), probably because of changes in policing strategy using diversion, mentoring, and community programmes for young people. A few weeks later, after a series of alarmist reports, the leader of the (then) parliamentary opposition party responded by demanding action against gangs (McConnell, 2022). Later the same year, a policy package developed prior to a general election due in 2023 was announced by the same politician declaring that young offenders will be sent to 'boot camps' (Wilson, 2022). This announcement stimulated a series of objections (since there is no evidence that 'boot camps' are effective in reducing crime), an indication that opinion among experts is much more thoughtful, and is sometimes reported, though one has to read beyond the headline to discover it. A search of news, entertainment, and social media will show that we live with a constant background of headlined crime reporting and television and movie crime dramas that seem designed to reinforce a narrative that has crime increasing in frequency and severity, matched by occasional political rhetoric supporting 'tough on crime' policies.

This is an inescapable background to everyday experience, which permits a tacit public agreement that crime is an increasing problem, and that 'tough-on-crime' policies and harsher punishments are a reasonable response. In this manner a discourse is created, a kind of conceptual theme music, effectively making us fearful. The conflation of subject matter is rarely examined. Crime is associated with youth, particularly with young Māori men, and with gangs. There are frequent calls for anti-gang legislation (for instance, Malpass, 2021; McKee, 2021; 1News, 2021), despite a recent review by Gilbert (2013, 2022), an expert on the history of gangs in Aotearoa New Zealand, of the effects of such targeted legislation, showing that in the past it has had no significant impact on gang activity. Occasionally a more nuanced view such as Walters' (2022) will go as far as to suggest media complicity: 'Outrage over a spike in

ramraids by youth offenders is a "classic example of moral panic", experts say. Media coverage and political rhetoric may also be playing a part in driving these offences' (paras. 1–2).

There is reason to accuse popular media, particularly TV crime dramas, of characterising danger as the threat of violence from strangers with sadistic intent. This picture supports a populist political agenda which promises to direct resources into policing gangs and an often ill-defined 'tough-on-crime' political agenda rather than towards the prevention of violence within families, which is a much more real and present danger (Houlihan, 2009).

CHARACTERISTICS OF YOUNG MEN IN TROUBLE

Returning to our cohort of young men who get into a lot of trouble, who have become the feared objects of this activity in the media, we can see some common patterns. They are, for instance, at significantly greater risk of traumatic brain injury. Professor Ian Lambie, writing for the office of the Scientific Advisor to the Prime Minister, reports on an intake of more than 1000 inmates of prisons in 2015. Almost two-thirds of the male offenders had had a traumatic brain injury and a third had had more than one, with one-fifth having sustained their first brain injury prior to age five. This was four times higher than a comparable sample in the community (Lambie, 2020). It is particularly noticeable among Māori men, who comprise more than half of the prison population, but only about 9% of the population at large—almost all of whom had several head injuries, typically the consequence of vehicle crashes, sporting injuries, and assaults (Lambie, 2020).

Men who get into trouble, as evidenced by the prison population, do tend, as expected in the arguments laid out above, to be poor, familiar with the criminal justice system through having family members with criminal histories, and to have educational deficits. They are more likely to exhibit symptoms of attention deficit and hyperactivity disorder, foetal alcohol spectrum disorder, autism spectrum disorder, dyslexia, hearing loss, and to have a psychiatric diagnosis or symptoms that would justify one if they had been examined, which many have not (Lambie, 2018b, 2020). They are also likely to have high scores on the Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs) inventory (Bergen-Cico et al., 2016).

Ian Lambie states the issue well:

> In the justice system, where all procedures are essentially word-based, a person's inability to quickly process and comprehend information in written or verbal form leaves them open to manipulation and entrapment. Propensities to take statements literally, to become confused by information and sensory overload, to act impulsively, to not see their actions in context, and to speak before thinking, make it difficult to navigate the complexities and nuances of the legal process. (Lambie, 2020, p. 5)

Our response to these worrying young men with their collection of deficits, difficulties, and poor verbal skills occurs in two steps. The first step is a reconstitution, a re-definition or a change in perspective, in large part a fearful response fed by the media-reinforced narrative on crime and danger, a perspective used politically in tough-on-crime narratives. At this point, rather than seeing a cohort of troubled and troublesome young men, we see what Foucault (2015) describes as the 'criminal-enemy'. Our cohort of damaged and destructive young men have made a transition to becoming a 'them' in a them-and-us universe populated by perpetrators and victims. We have an idea, the criminal-enemy, an abstraction, an identity created by a certain discourse on crime and punishment within society. The second step is when we take a significant proportion of them and put them together, behind high concrete walls topped with razor wire so that they cannot escape.

INTOXICATING PERFORMATIVITY AND HOMOGENEITY

Let us consider what happens to our group of young men in the midst of these discourses, how they respond to these media reports, to the world of retributive punishment; what happens to a young man who is labelled as the enemy, a criminal, an outlaw, a person who is unacceptable, locked away from society for the safety of others, and who is now in daily contact with older men who have been in and out of the criminal justice system for a long time? With a high incidence of adverse childhood experience, traumatic brain injury, literacy problems, ADHD (attention-deficit/hyperactivity disorder), foetal alcohol syndrome, autism spectrum disorder, dyslexia, and so on, what should we expect next?

The behaviour of young people, perhaps all people to some extent, tends to escalate in each other's presence. Cooped up with little outlet for their considerable energies, young men with a propensity for chaotic, destructive, and dangerous behaviour will experience an intensification, a hyperarousal of these behaviours. They will get into fights, flout the rules, and take risks, and in doing so, they will join or help create a culture where all of these bodily acts contribute to their status within the group. To be sent to solitary confinement, the 'Management Unit' as it is officially called, or 'The Pound' as prisoners affectionately call it (co-opting the name of a holding place for stray dogs), is a source of standing, of mana. To 'trash' one's cell, to smash everything that can be smashed, to refuse to co-operate with the authorities, are expressions of anger at life, at the world, at a society that does not care for them, at the family who are unable to offer opportunity, at the abuser who engaged or forced them into sexual activity before they could understand what sexual activity was. It is anger at the judicial system that seems populated with people of privilege and power, comfortable with their assets, their education, their homes, and their salaries. However, more than being an expression of anger, these destructive performances serve a positive end; they establish an identity that is not just a way of being in the world, but a way of *seeing oneself* being, a criminal identity.

There is mana in being an outlaw. There is pride in recklessness, there is status in destructive behaviour. The other side of the them-and-us divide has its own us-and-them philosophical position. Time and again we see men in prison or recently released carrying themselves with a kind of pride in their delinquency, as though saying, 'you think I'm bad? I'll show you bad'. Uncaring about their personal safety, now they are with a group of friends who will be more or less loyal for the rest of their lives, with mentors who will show them how to be better criminals, and with no fear of returning to jail. It feels a lot better than being a victim (recalling the high ACEs scores.) It is a way to be *someone*.

A criminal identity has been created, not by the individual but by a system of retributive punishment and by the *dispositif* that incarcerates him. His way of walking, his use of language, his dress, the way he sits, how he uses his eyes to greet or threaten, all these practices, learned and rehearsed every day of his imprisonment, become his identity. They are who he is.

He can see himself as in a mirror, sometimes literally, as he checks how his tattoos move over the muscles developed by exercising in prison, and he sees himself reflected in the gestures of others. The use of violence comes with this identity. He is now much more likely to assault someone, and in particular someone close to him. In de Beauvoir's (1949/2011) terms he has recourse to his fists, his anger and revolt are expressed with muscle. He is recognised and applauded by others who possess a similar status. In the same way that the awkward, rebellious boy at school who gets into trouble, who fights in the playground, or defies the teacher finds himself with a new group of friends, other children who admire his behaviour and want to be in his company (Manning, 1995, 1997), the young man in prison has stepped over a line. He has become something new. His mentors will guide and tutor him. He can walk tall, feel a sense of being, of belonging, of fitting in, of being accepted in a way that mitigates all the hurts, the insults, the slights, and the abuse that he has suffered in the past. His failures at school, his humiliation because his literacy is poor, his disenfranchised ethnicity, his shame at not understanding what others seem to cope with easily, his sense of being unimportant, of being nothing at all, an object, at best to be used, at worst an inconvenience; all of these psychological burdens are now unimportant, as the new identity solidifies.

VIOLENCE TOWARD WOMEN

Using a concept from Deleuze (1993), adapted and elaborated by Rose (1998), we can suggest that along with this identity formation comes a series of attitudes, *enfolded* along with bodily technologies to become part of the felt identity. As Rose (1998) puts it: 'The aspect of human being that is surrounded and enfolded in so many contemporary assemblages of subjectification is neither body/pleasure nor flesh/desire but self/realization' (p. 201). Quite

without our volition, just by practicing ways of being in the world, absorbing a way of wearing clothes, of walking, and if we are at liberty, of going to certain places, eating certain foods, shopping in particular places, listening to a certain kind of music, going to a certain genre of movies, having, or avoiding, certain conversations, we are being performed. In the process of enfolding, the external is not introjected in the psychodynamic sense, as an object in the psyche, it becomes the *psyche*. As Butler (1993) points out, this is not something we are deliberately doing, not a performance that we are putting on and can drop at will. These are technologies, ways of being, enfolded to create who we are. We are performed by discourse which originates in the outer but creates the inner. Along with the physical trappings comes belief and disposition towards the subjects in our environment, whether friends, shopkeepers, or intimate partners, or topics or politics. The elements that sustain us, that form 'self-objects' in the sense meant by self-psychology (Wolf, 1988), supporting and identifying us to ourselves and others, include beliefs about self, others, and the world, and attitudinal stances toward everything and everybody we encounter. In prison, among these attitudes, these perspectival positions in relation to the world and its inhabitants, is a norm endorsing the domination of women.

At times our view of such beliefs involves the idea of *entitlement*. We might say that this man whose behaviour towards women is as though they are objects of desire, a class of subjects whose purpose is to serve and who can be beaten when they fail to please, might be described as entitled, or as having a quality of entitlement, as though it were an element in their make-up, a part of their personality (Bancroft, 2003). The question of choice in criminality is too large a topic to be dealt with here, but for the time being we can observe that, when he is arrested, charged, and brought before a magistrate for violence toward a woman, his behaviour is likely to be treated as though it were either a voluntary, deliberate strategy of domination or an irredeemable badness in his character. This resembles the assemblage of ideas concerning belief, entitlement, volition, and badness that drives news reports on the impact of crime on victims. 'I think these idiots are the scum of the earth… somehow we have to stamp this out' (Moore, 2022). Such reports are a familiar aspect of the world of ideas that we accept as the normal.

That the norm is a changing concept, a convention that 'draws its meaning, function and value from the fact of the existence, outside itself, of what does not meet the requirement it serves' (Canguilhem, 1966/1991, p. 239), may be understandable in an abstract sense, but for day-to-day practice, we act as though we believe in the essential permanence of our sense of self and the world. That belief, entitlement, volition, badness are temporary conceptual schemas creating meaning for us in response to what disturbs and horrifies us, a mechanism for creating the 'primacy of a subjectivity… an existence reacting to a setting' (Roudinesco, 2005/2010, pp. 16–17) is not easy to grasp. We tend to regard volition, for instance, as a truth. It is only when looking back on our own decisions that we can understand what was impossible to see at the time, that we operated from a very limited range of choices, and that

our decision making was determined by current discourse, by our 'existence reacting to a setting', in Roudinesco's terms. When we read an account of a witness describing offenders as 'scum', it satisfies an outrage at the nature of the offence—in the account quoted above, the perpetrator(s) had gone joyriding in a graveyard.

Recent research from the USA indicates that most victims of crime would prefer resources to be spent on education, rehabilitation, job creation, and mental health treatment than on prison (Alliance for Safety and Justice, 2016), but what gets reported is much more often a sense of outrage, of horror, with an explicit or implicit demand for harsh punishment. Anticipating a general election in 2023, the leader of a major political party said on radio,

> The prison population sadly will have to rise. We've tried letting the worst offenders out and all they've done is make people feel unsafe. Putting people in prison is expensive, but it's a very good deal compared with having bad people on the street scaring ordinary New Zealanders from enjoying their lives. (as cited in Dexter, 2022, 1:03)

Thus, the story of victim outrage and the demand for imprisonment becomes tethered to a political agenda which has it that bad people are deciding to make life difficult for the rest of us. What allows a witness, and the press reporting the witness, to call the offender(s) 'scum' is that they made a considered decision to desecrate something, to deliberately offend us.

Examining the lives of our cohort of young men, the idea of volition, of decision making, of a sense of entitlement, is shaky at best. In prison, violent, exploitative relationships with women—another kind of desecration—are celebrated with a 'good on ya mate' affirmation. An objectifying, externalising masculine sexuality becomes discourse in a self-constituting assemblage of domestic power relations, just as the desecration of a graveyard serves as a statement in another system of power relations. In Canguilhem's (1966/1991) discussion of the norm and the normal, he observes that, 'Every preference for a possible order is accompanied, most often implicitly, by the aversion for the opposite possible order' (p. 240). He adds that there can be an inversion, 'as the ethical norm, where sincerity prevails over duplicity, can be inverted into a norm where duplicity prevails over sincerity' (p. 240). Thus, there is a striking contrast between the norm expressed in news media, that of revulsion at the behaviour of offenders, and the subjectivity that develops in prison, such that violence towards women and the desecration of graveyards become sources of status. From both perspectives, that of the witness whose revulsion is reported by a journalist, and that of the offender joyriding in the graveyard or the prisoner with a history of violence towards women, the preferred order is accompanied by an aversion for and a rejection of its opposite.

THE CONGEALING OF AGENCY AND ITS LABELS

A recent shift in ways of thinking about Foucault's concept of governmentality has appeared in a branch of philosophy known as 'the new materialisms' which focus on a broader canvas than discourse, including non-human as well as human interactions. Thomas Lemke (2015), writing on Foucault and governmentality, defines the project thus: 'to reconceptualize the interrelations (or "intra-actions" in Barad's vocabulary) between humans and non-humans and to rethink the categories of subjectivity, agency and causality' (p. 6).

The reference to Barad (2008) is to her definition of agency as a relationship, an aspect of 'intra-action' (her neologism for the interactions between human and non-human elements). 'Matter does not refer to a fixed substance; rather, *matter is substance in its intra-active becoming—not a thing but a doing, a congealing of agency'* (Barad, 2008, quoted in Lemke, 2015, pp. 14–15).

This idea of a *congealing of agency* perhaps better describes the development of a normative reversal in prisons. Foucault's (1975/1995) carceral operates to define, not just the external power relations between officers, prisoners, the court, and so on, but the relations between their beliefs, attitudes, their sense and perceived quality of volition, their internal relations, within and between the various groupings of the carceral assemblage. Agency, the operation of deliberate choice, is attributed to the defendant by the prosecution, by the victim if there is one, by the judge, and by the press, since a description as 'scum' and a punitive sentence only makes sense as a response to deliberate harm, to encourage reflection and a change of heart, and to deter others from deciding to commit the same infringement. All of these envisaged outcomes require the offender to be possessed of agentive power, to own the ability *as an individual* to exert control over their actions.

It makes more sense, from our perspective, to regard these qualities—codes, law, ethics, an assumed agency—as pertaining within the assemblage. The ethical systems among prisoners will have these qualities, but their detail will not be the same as those expressed in the courts, the news media, or even among elements closer to the prisoner community, such as prison officers. In the news stories, the criminal is *other*, and is reviled, rejected, cast out from society while the victim is nurtured. In the prisoner community, the situation is reversed; prisoners will assist and nurture each other in their own way (which is not necessarily the same as nurturance understood outside the prison), while the victim, in this case women at large and in particular intimate partners, become other and are reviled. The effects of this assemblage are horrifying, but this perspective does explain what we see. Support for male violence towards women, for sexual violence, rape, domination, the enslavement of intimate partners by means of physical, economic, and social control, can be readily found in male prisons. If intimate partner violence were adequately explained by an aetiology based on volition, on choice, one would expect imprisonment to act as a deterrent, for rational choice would be unlikely to be for prison. Theories of entitlement and individual agency struggle to

explain the ineffectiveness of prison as either deterrent or rehabilitative measure (Manning & Nicholls, 2020; Reiman & Leighton, 2020).

In this view, violence towards women can be seen as a visible expression of the discursive environment. The brutality of the inmate's behaviour towards his female partner becomes part of the conversation in prison. Of course, prison is not the only place where one finds such talk, but it is very obvious there. Stories of domination, infidelity, violence toward one's partner, 'putting her in her place', of rape, of 'gang-banging', are exchanged with energy and pride, and younger members of the community are instructed, mentored, and supported in their schooling in these areas by older men who have done more jail time. Enfolding these technologies creates a subjectification such that the resulting identity is defined in a large part by violence. Having already been identified as a criminal-enemy, as the other of contemporary society, certain labels come into play; functional terms such as 'disorders,' emotive ones such as 'scum', all of which drives the enemy further out of the mainstream and into another assemblage.

With these enfoldings comes an acceptance of being in prison; it becomes a familiar place, a place to return to, where there are friends and where it is safe, rather than somewhere fearful. Men will say that they instantly feel relaxed as soon as the cell door closes. By means of these constituting processes, in the assemblage formed by prisoners, the domination of women and the return to prison have become aspects of the norm. We can see a homogeneity develop among prisoners, a same-ness in body language, style of speech, opinion, and attitudes. We can observe that gangsters look like gangsters, prisoners look like prisoners, in and out of prison. They recognise each other, and will continue to do so, 'outside the wire' as well as inside. There are many stories, on release from prison, of how a man goes to an unfamiliar town, perhaps intending to get away from an old, dangerous environment, only to find that, within the first day, he has met another former prisoner, another drug user, another potential partner in crime. This situation is experienced as, and is referred to in the media and the courts as volitional, a choice, but it is questionable whether agency congealed thus remains at all agentic as the court understands it.

It is not so remarkable. We are all subject to creating homogeneities in everyday life. It assists us in recognising people like ourselves. We are comfortable in *our* homogeneity and tend to become anxious among those who are not like us. Any culture will appear to have a sameness to outsiders, differences only apparent to its members, and this cultural homogeneity extends not just to outward appearance, but to the way people think. As Rose (1998) describes, we invent ourselves out of available material in the environment and we practice that invention, enfolding behaviour, speech, and belief such that it becomes the felt sense of self. Philosopher Rick Roderick puts it eloquently in one of his televised lectures,

> If you want to know how someone thinks, look at how they dress, who they hang out with, where they live, the kinds of folks they went to school with, how big is their bank account, and you'll pretty much know where they're coming from. (Roderick, 1990)

The homogeneity among what is now identified as the criminal-enemy community is well expressed in the following letter from a Corrections Officer to the abolitionist organisation People Against Prisons Aotearoa, dated May 22, 2022:

> What a load of CRAP you people peddle!!! As a corrections officer with 15 damn years experience I can tell you we are sick to the back teeth of little groups like yours hammering us for keeping people like you safe… we are sick to death of the constant criticism and lack of accountability to those who would wish to harm us every single day we walk the floor. I would challenge every single one of you to come and spend a day in a management unit where the only thing these people who YOU refer to as 'misunderstood' want to do is slice your throat… spit on you… throw fecal matter at you… then come tell us prisons aren't needed. YOU ALL LIVE IN A FANTASY WORLD. I will continue to advocate for my brothers and sisters who work behind the wire and continue to call out groups like yours that criticise us for keeping dangerous criminals locked away so that you can sleep safely at night!!! [Emphasis in the original.]

I cannot fault the author of this message. His experience is real, describing well the escalation of destructive behaviour in confinement. In a situation where there are few ways to express that escalation, one's own saliva and faeces is what is left to use as a weapon.

In Foucault's (1978) description of how homosexuality is expressed in society, he describes a 'reverse discourse', in which adverse labelling and prejudice is transformed into a voice for homosexual identities. Terms like 'gay', 'queer', 'queen', and 'dyke' are thus used with pride, as affirmations, signifiers for a positive felt identity. The criminal-enemy, reversing the mainstream discourse, similarly comes into its own in a positive way as a voice, as a desired state, cultivated, reached for, and celebrated. Men with prison experience will proudly refer to themselves as 'crim' or 'mobster' or 'deviant' and will joke about how 'sick' they are. Here a man may co-opt and reverse the media message, and tattoo 'scum' on himself. There is a gang called the 'Filthy Few'.

The picture of prisons filled with dangerous, psychopathic men expressed in this email is a familiar one. Prison-based scenes in movies and television dramas often depict the inmates of a prison as ruthless, selfish, dangerous, and lacking in remorse, (for example, *American History X*, Kaye, 1998; *Cell 211*, Monzón, 2009; *Death Warrant*, Sarafian, 1990; *Brawl in Cell Block 99*, Zahler, 2017). There are exceptions, such as *The Shawshank Redemption* (Darabont, 1994) in which compassion and friendship emerge in prison, and this theme is often present to some degree, but there is always, foreground or background, psychopathy, unrepentant violence, the outlaw society, rejecting the values of the mainstream. It is eventually unclear to what extent art imitates the reality of prison, or whether prison imitates the movies.

Canguilhem (1966/1991), in the penultimate paragraph to the first part of his treatise, *The Normal and the Pathological*, writes: 'Thus it is first and foremost because men feel sick that medicine exists. It is only secondarily that men know, because medicine exists, in what way they are sick' (p. 229). Were we to extrapolate, as Canguilhem does in Part Two, written twenty years after his original thesis, to the social, rather than the physiological (the original

focus of Canguilhem's work), we might suggest that it is because we are disturbed by the behaviour of some among us that we have prisons, but only secondarily do we know, because we have prisons, in what way we are disturbed. It is the existence of prisons and the behaviour and norms that accompany them that define the problem that prisons exist in order to solve.

Alongside what we take for the common norm develops what is thus defined as the pathological. However, rather than seeing a diagnosis, a 'disorder', we are defining it here as a discourse. Particularly inside the prisons, but also among the mainstream, a criminal subjectivity develops, both as a felt self and as a projection by popular media. That this is fantasy, a story that takes on an aura of truth by being often repeated, is illustrated by emerging journalistic writing that investigates how victims of crime really feel, rather than how their feelings are reported, revealing much more nuance than the commonly reported story of outrage (Chammah, 2022).

Leaning on Judith Butler's (1990) theory of gender identity, we have written elsewhere about an 'intoxicating performativity' in this dramatic shift (Manning & Nicholls, 2020). The sense of being in the world is radically changed by adopting the body language, the attitudes, the beliefs of a prisoner. What is normal, the norm, changes radically depending on the point of view. Canguilhem's moral inversion, Foucault's reversal, an aversion for the opposite, in this case for the commonly accepted norm among prisoners, is reflected as the mainstream reciprocates with images of criminals and prisoners.

THE DETERRENCE AND REHABILITATION HYPOTHESES

A note is needed here, which both supports the thesis developed above and indicates room for cautious optimism. Between 2018 and 2022, the time of writing, the prison muster in Aotearoa New Zealand was reduced from a high of about 10,000 to under 8,000, a remarkable 20%. Data provided by the Department of Corrections tracking the prison population according to age group indicate that the bulk of the reduction is in young men. Programmes offered by the prisons cannot account for this, as their effectiveness in reducing rates of recidivism has never been impressive and appears, if anything, to be declining (Department of Corrections | Ara Poutama Aotearoa, 2018, 2019, 2020, 2021). Crime rates have fluctuated, and possibly declined somewhat, but not enough to account for this development. The reduction in numbers of young men going to prison appears, then, to be due to changes in policing and sentencing practices, evidence of a consciousness of what drives sentencing patterns (Gluckman, 2018) and of the 'pipeline' whereby children in the care of the state eventually become prisoners (Lambie, 2018a). It remains to be seen to what extent drug courts and young offenders' courts, with their emphasis on fair hearing and plain language are affecting recidivism rates, but anecdotal evidence is promising (Ryan, 2022).

The two most compelling arguments for prisons are that they are a deterrent and that they offer opportunities for rehabilitation. The deterrent effect of imprisonment can be assessed by examining rates of recidivism. In Aotearoa New Zealand, almost 73% of prisoners under twenty years of age are resentenced and more than half are back in prison within two years of release (Department of Corrections | Ara Poutama Aotearoa, 2021). On average, over all age groups and all ethnicities, almost 60% are resentenced within two years, with 40% already back inside. We know from another Corrections study that the recidivism graph does not level off until more than five years after release, so these numbers will keep climbing for at least another three years following release (Nadesu, 2009).

A FINAL NOTE

A note on the responsibility of authorship is necessary here. This work argues that imprisonment perpetuates, rather than prevents, the conditions for intimate partner violence, but it is not enough just to state a theoretical and philosophical position, especially where it might appear to remove or neglect individual responsibility. Such work as this must be accompanied by a political responsibility to eliminate men's violence against women. The means of change requires activism at both individual and societal levels, alongside ongoing theorising of the causes and conditions for it. The former requires, among other things, a truly postmodern psychotherapy for men who use violence. That is a project in progress.

The central issue for any therapy specifically aimed at reducing violence, rather than psychotherapy's more comfortable goal of alleviating distress, is that we can say we are capable, but not exactly of what we are capable. One thing we can be sure of in the case considered here is that imprisonment is not conducive to rising above its constituting effects, as the processes that create the self operate in prison to create the subjectivity that must be imprisoned.

REFERENCES

1News. (2021, June 9). *Judith Collins says Government is 'soft on gangs' despite major police bust.* https://www.1news.co.nz/2021/06/08/judith-collins-says-government-is-soft-on-gangs-despite-major-police-bust/

Andrews, K., Lariccia, L., Talwar, V., & Bosacki, S. (2021). Empathetic concern in emerging adolescents: The role of theory of mind and gender roles. *Journal of Early Adolescence*, *41*(9), 1394–1424. https://doi.org/10.1177/02724316211002258

Alliance for Safety and Justice. (2016). *Crime survivors speak*. https://allianceforsafetyandjustice.org/wp-content/uploads/documents/Crime%20Survivors%20Speak%20Report.pdf

Bancroft, L. (2003). *Why does he do that? Inside the minds of angry and controlling men*. Penguin.

Barad, K. (2008). Posthumanist performativity: Toward an understanding of how matter comes to matter. In S. Alaimo & S. Hekman (Eds.), *Material feminisms* (pp. 120–154). Indiana University Press.

Batrinos, M. L. (2012). Testosterone and aggressive behavior in man. *International Journal of Endocrinology and Metabolism*, *10*(3), 563–568. https://doi.org/10.5812/ijem.3661

Bergen-Cico, D., Wolf-Stanton, S., Filipovic, R., & Weisberg, J. (2016). Trauma and neurological risks of addiction. In V. R. Preedy (Ed.), *The neuropathology of drug addictions and substance misuse* (pp. 61–70). Academic Press. https://doi.org/10.1016/B978-0-12-800213-1.00006-7

Butler, J. (1990). *Gender trouble: Feminism and the subversion of identity.* Routledge.

Butler, J. (1993). *Bodies that matter: On the discursive limits of sex*. Routledge.

Butler, J. (2004). *Undoing gender*. Routledge.

Canguilhem, G. (1991). *The normal and the pathological*. Zone Books. (Original work published 1966)

Caspi, A., McClay, J., Moffitt, T. E., Mill, J., Martin, J., Craig, I. W., Taylor, A., & Poulton, R. (2002). Role of genotype in the cycle of violence in maltreated children. *Science*, *297*(5582), 851–854. https://doi.org/10.1126/science.1072290

Chammah, M. (2022, October 31). *Would a death sentence help the parkland families heal?* The Marshall Project. https://www.themarshallproject.org/2022/10/31/for-families-shattered-by-mass-shootings-would-a-death-sentence-help-them-heal

Clark, T. C., Fleming, T., Bullen, P., Denny, S., Crengle, S., Dyson, B., Fortune, S., Lucassen, M., Peiris-John, R., Robinson, E., Rossen, F., Sheridan, J., Teevale, T., & Utter, J. (2013). *Youth'12 Overview: The health and wellbeing of New Zealand secondary school students in 2012. The University of Auckland.* https://www.fmhs.auckland.ac.nz/assets/fmhs/faculty/ahrg/docs/2012-overview.pdf

Cruickshank, G. (2014). *The participation of women employed in traditionally male dominated occupations including plumbing: 1975–2013*. Occasional & Discussion Paper Series 1/2015. Unitec ePress. https://www.unitec.ac.nz/epress/wp-content/uploads/2015/02/The-Participation-of-Women-Employed-in-Traditionally-Male-Dominated-Occupations-including-Plumbing-1975-2013-by-Garry-Cruickshank.pdf

Darabont, F. (Director). (1994). *The Shawshank redemption* [Film]. Columbia Pictures.

de Beauvoir, S. (2011). *The second sex.* Vintage Books. (Original work published 1949)

Deleuze, G. (1993). *The fold: Leibniz and the baroque*. University of Minnesota Press.

Department of Corrections | Ara Poutama Aotearoa. (2018). *Annual report: 2017–2018.* https://www.corrections.govt.nz/__data/assets/pdf_file/0005/33809/Department_of_Corrections_Annual_Report_2017_2018.pdf

Department of Corrections | Ara Poutama Aotearoa. (2019). *Annual report: 2018–2019.* https://www.corrections.govt.nz/__data/assets/pdf_file/0008/38852/Annual_Report_2018_2019_Web_Version_Final.pdf

Department of Corrections | Ara Poutama Aotearoa. (2020). *Annual report: 2019–2020.* https://www.corrections.govt.nz/__data/assets/pdf_file/0018/42273/Annual_Report_2019_2020.pdf

Department of Corrections | Ara Poutama Aotearoa. (2021). *Annual report: 2020–2021.* https://www.corrections.govt.nz/__data/assets/pdf_file/0010/44398/Annual_Report_2020_2021_Final_Web.pdf

Department of Corrections | Ara Poutama Aotearoa. (2022). *Annual report: 2021–2022.* https://www.corrections.govt.nz/__data/assets/pdf_file/0005/48506/Annual_Report_2021_22_Digital.pdf

Dexter, G. (2022, August 17). *Law and order set to become political football in 2023* [Radio broadcast]. Radio New Zealand. https://www.rnz.co.nz/national/programmes/morningreport/audio/2018853898/law-and-order-set-to-become-political-football-in-2023

Doyle, K. (2022, April 30). *Is youth crime really a growing problem and what can be done about it?* Stuff. https://www.stuff.co.nz/pou-tiaki/300576087/is-youth-crime-really-a-growing-problem-and-what-can-be-done-about-it

Figure.nz. (2013). *Gender ratio of tertiary enrolment by select OECD countries*. https://figure.nz/chart/YCCNvbJiFCwLA4Nw

Fleming, T. M., Merry, S. N., Robinson, E. M., Denny, S. J., & Watson, P. D. (2007). Self-reported suicide attempts and associated risk and protective factors among secondary school students in New Zealand. *Australian and New Zealand Journal of Psychiatry*, *41*(3), 213–221. https://doi.org/10.1080/00048670601050481

Foucault, M. (1978). *The history of sexuality. Volume 1: The will to knowledge* (R. Hurley, Trans.). Pelican Books.

Foucault, M. (1995). *Discipline and punish: The birth of the prison*. Vintage Books. (Original work published 1975)

Foucault, M. (2015). *The punitive society: Lectures at the Collège de France 1972–1973*. Palgrave Macmillan.

Gilbert, J. (2013). *Patched: The history of gangs in New Zealand*. Auckland University Press.

Gilbert, J. (2022). *Making gang laws in a panic: Lessons from the 1990s and beyond*. University of Canterbury and The Law Foundation.

Gluckman, P. (2018). *Using evidence to build a better justice system: The challenge of rising prison costs.* Office of the Prime Minister's Chief Science Advisor.

https://www.dpmc.govt.nz/sites/default/files/2021-10/pmcsa-Using-evidence-to-build-a-better-justice-system.pdf

Houlihan, A. (2009). Stranger danger? Cultural constructions of sadistic serial killers in US crime dramas. In M. Segrave (Ed.), *Australia and New Zealand Critical Criminology Conference 2009: Conference Proceedings* (pp. 111–121). Monash University.

Hu, Z., Chan, R. C., & McAlonan, G. M. (2010). Maturation of social attribution skills in typically developing children: An investigation using the social attribution task. *Behavioural and Brain Functions*, *6*, 10. https://doi.org/10.1186/1744-9081-6-10

Jeffries, S. (2001). *Gender judgments: An investigation of gender differentiation in sentencing and remand in New Zealand* [Doctoral dissertation, University of Canterbury]. UC Library: Communities & Collections. http://dx.doi.org/10.26021/4001

Kaye, T. (Director). (1998). *American History X* [Film]. New Line Cinema.

Krauthamer, H. S. (2021). *The great pronoun shift: The big impact of little parts of speech*. Routledge.

Kristof, N. (2010, March 27). The boys have fallen behind. *New York Times*. https://www.nytimes.com/2010/03/28/opinion/28kristof.html

Kulish, N. (2010). Clinical implications of contemporary gender theory. *Journal of the American Psychoanalytic Association*, *58*(2), 231–258. https://doi.org/10.1177/0003065110370352

Lambie, I. (2018a). *It's never too early, never too late: A discussion paper on preventing youth offending in New Zealand.* Office of the Prime Minister's Chief Science Advisor. https://researchspace.auckland.ac.nz/handle/2292/47689

Lambie, I. (2018b). *Using evidence to build a better justice system: The challenge of rising prison costs*. Office of the Prime Minister's Chief Science Advisor. https://researchspace.auckland.ac.nz/handle/2292/47690

Lambie, I. (2020). *What were they thinking? A discussion paper on brain and behaviour in relation to the justice system in New Zealand*. Office of the Prime Minister's Chief Science Advisor. https://www.dpmc.govt.nz/sites/default/files/2022-04/PMCSA-20-02_What-were-they-thinking-A-discussion-paper-on-brain-and-behaviour.pdf

Lemke, T. (2015). New materialisms: Foucault and 'the Government of Things'. *Theory, Culture & Society*, *32*(4), 3–25. https://doi.org/10.1177/0263276413519340

Li, C.-Q., Zhang, J.-S., Ma, S., Lv, R.-R., Duan, J.-L., Luo, D.-M., Yan, X.-J., Ma, N., & Song, Y. (2020). Gender differences in self-harm and drinking behaviors among high school students in Beijing, China. *BMC Public Health*, *20*, 1892. https://doi.org/10.1186/s12889-020-09979-6

Malpass, L. (2021, February 24). *Judith Collins doubles down on crime rhetoric, says prison numbers might need to rise*. Stuff. https://www.stuff.co.nz/national/politics/124341258/judith-collins-doubles-down-on-crime-rhetoric-says-prison-numbers-might-need-to-rise

Manning, S. (1995). The FU decision: Reflections on antisocial role development. *Journal of the Australia and New Zealand Psychodrama Association*, *4*, 1–11. https://aanzpa.org/wp-content/uploads/ANZPA_Journal_04_art01.pdf

Manning, S. (1997). Working with antisocial personality disorder. *Forum—Journal of the New Zealand Association of Psychotherapists*, *3*(1), 110–128. https://doi.org/10.9791/ajpanz.1997.09

Manning, S., & Nicholls, D. A. (2020). The assembly of a criminal self. *Ata: Journal of Psychotherapy Aotearoa New Zealand*, *24*(2), 43–61. https://doi.org/10.9791/ajpanz.2020.11

Mascarenhas, D. (2021). Consequentialism and retributivism in civic republican punishment. *Academia Letters*, 1402. https://www.academia.edu/49960251/Consequentialism_and_Retributivism_in_Civic_Republican_Punishment

McConnell, G. (2022, June 11). *'We need action against gangs right now': Chris Luxon details new gang plan*. Stuff. https://www.stuff.co.nz/national/politics/300610874/we-need-action-against-gangs-right-now-chris-luxon-details-new-gang-plan

McKee, N. (2021, July 27). *Nicole McKee: Labour's soft on crime approach fertilising growing gang problem*. Newshub. https://www.newshub.co.nz/home/politics/2021/07/nicole-mckee-labour-s-soft-on-crime-approach-fertilising-growing-gang-problem.html

Meehan, L., Pacheco, G., & Pushon, Z. (2019). Explaining ethnic disparities in bachelor's degree participation: Evidence from NZ. *Studies in Higher Education*, *44*(7), 1130–1152. https://doi.org/10.1080/03075079.2017.1419340

Ministry of Justice. (2021). *Youth Justice Indicators Summary Report: December 2021*. https://www.justice.govt.nz/assets/Youth-Justice-Indicators-Summary-Report-December-2021-FINAL.pdf

Monzón, D. (Director). (2009). *Celda 211* [Cell 211] [Film]. Paramount.

Moore, R. (2022, August 03). Man arrested after Waipā cemetery vandalised. *Waikato Times*. https://www.stuff.co.nz/waikato-times/news/300652785/man-arrested-after-waip-cemetery-vandalised-and-grave-driven-over-causing-3000-damage

Nadesu, A. (2009). *Reconviction patterns of offenders managed in the community: A 60-months follow-up analysis.* Department of Corrections. https://www.corrections.govt.nz/__data/assets/pdf_file/0013/10714/Reconviction_Report_2009_Community_Sentences.pdf

Narmandakh, A., Roest, A. M., de Jonge, P., & Oldehinkel, A. J. (2021). Psychosocial and biological risk factors of anxiety disorders in adolescents: A TRAILS report. *European Child & Adolescent Psychiatry*, *30*(12), 1969–1982. https://doi.org/10.1007/s00787-020-01669-3

The New Zealand Youth Suicide Prevention Strategy. (2000). *Youth suicide facts: 1997 statistics*. https://tinyurl.com/mwan6nxh

Pomeroy, D. C. H. (2016). *Enabling mathematical minds: How social class, ethnicity, and gender influence mathematics learning in New Zealand secondary schools* [Doctoral thesis, University of Cambridge]. Apollo. https://doi.org/10.17863/CAM.24945

Reiman, J., & Leighton, P. (2020). *The rich get richer and the poor get prison: Ideology, class, and criminal justice* (12th ed.). Pearson/Allyn & Bacon.

Roderick, R. (1990). *Rick Roderick on Hegel and Modern Life. Philosophy and Human Values lecture series* [YouTube video]. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2MsNyR-epBM

Rose, N. (1998). *Inventing our selves: Psychology, power, and personhood.* Cambridge University Press.

Roudinesco, E. (2010). *Philosophy in turbulent times: Canguilhem, Sartre, Foucault, Althusser, Deleuze, Derrida* (W. McCuaig, Trans.). Columbia University Press. (Original work published 2005)

Ryan, K. (2022, October 27). *Stopping young ram raiders*. Radio New Zealand. https://www.rnz.co.nz/national/programmes/ninetonoon/audio/2018864335/stopping-young-ram-raiders

Sarafian, D. (Director). (1990). *Death warrant* [Film]. MGM-Pathé.

Snook, I., & O’Neill, J. (2010). Social class and educational achievement: Beyond ideology. *New Zealand Journal of Educational Studies*, *45*(2), 3–18. https://search.informit.org/doi/10.3316/informit.621745966557638

Vandello, J. A., & Cohen, D. (2008). Culture, gender, and men’s intimate partner violence. *Social and Personality Psychology Compass*, *2*(2), 652–667. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1751-9004.2008.00080.x

Walters, L. (2022, May 17). *‘Moral panic’ over ramraids exacerbates the problem, experts say*. Stuff. https://www.stuff.co.nz/national/crime/128656032/moral-panic-over-ramraids-exacerbates-the-problem-experts-say

Williams, J. (2019). *Build a bridge and get over it: The role of colonial dispossession in contemporary indigenous offending and what we should do about it.* Robin Cooke Lecture. https://www.courtsofnz.govt.nz/assets/speechpapers/20191204-Williams-J.pdf

Wilson, P. (2022, 18 November). *Week in politics: National gets tough on young offenders, but policy faces strong opposition.* Radio New Zealand. https://www.rnz.co.nz/news/on-the-inside/479033/week-in-politics-national-gets-tough-on-young-offenders-but-policy-faces-strong-opposition

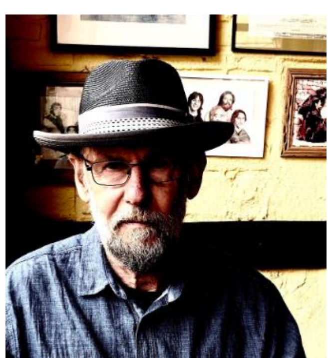
Wolf, E. S. (1988). *Treating the self: Elements of clinical self psychology.* Guilford.

Zahler, S. C. (2017). *Brawl in cell block 99* [Film]. RLJE Films.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

This, and related work by the author(s), could not have been written without the support of the Moana House therapeutic community in Dunedin, Aotearoa New Zealand, the Otago Corrections Facility, and all the men in both locations who have been willing to share their experiences and histories.

AUTHOR BIOGRAPHY



Seán Manning was raised in Belfast, Northern Ireland, and has lived in Aotearoa/New Zealand since 1975. He has three adult children and two grandchildren. Seán is a registered psychotherapist and Kaihaumanu—clinical specialist—at Moana House therapeutic community for male offenders in Dunedin, New Zealand. He also works for a stopping violence programme and maintains a small private practice. He has qualifications in psychology, social work, Māori studies, and psychotherapy, and is currently pursuing a Doctorate in Health Science. His specialty is criminality, violence, and addiction. His command of Māori language is deteriorating with age, but is still better than his Irish, and he is working on his Spanish. He plays the Irish harp and tenor banjo just well enough to have company.

Dave Nicholls is a Professor of Critical Physiotherapy in the School of Clinical Sciences at AUT University in Auckland, New Zealand. He is a physiotherapist, lecturer, researcher, and writer, with a passion for critical thinking in and around the physical therapies. David is the founder of the Critical Physiotherapy Network, an organisation that promotes the use of cultural studies, education, history, philosophy, sociology, and a range of other disciplines in the study of the profession's past, present, and future. He is also co-founder and chair of the International Physiotherapy History Association Executive, and founding Executive member of the Environmental Physiotherapy Association. David's own research work focuses on the critical history of physiotherapy and considers how physiotherapy might need to adapt to the changing economy of health care in the 21st century. He has published numerous peer-reviewed articles and book chapters, many as first author. He was co-editor on the first collection of critical physiotherapy writings—*Manipulating Practices* (Cappelen Damm, 2018)—and he is lead editor for the follow-up titled *Mobilising Knowledge* (Routledge, 2020). He is also very active on social media, writing nearly 700 blogposts for criticalphysio.net over the last five years. David has taught in physiotherapy programmes in the UK and New

Zealand for over 25 years and has presented his work all around the world. *The End of Physiotherapy*—the first book-length critical history of physiotherapy, and written by David—was published by Routledge in mid-2017, and a second sole-authored book titled *Physiotherapy Otherwise* was published by Tuwhera in 2022.

Dr Elizabeth Day is a Head of Department of Psychotherapy at the Auckland University of Technology where she conducts and supervises research, and teaches in the Master of Psychotherapy program. She has published on field theory, mindfulness, gender and sexuality identity, the philosophical bases of psychotherapy, telepsychotherapy, and professional practice, and co-edited the book *Psychotherapy and Counselling: Reflections on Practice* (Oxford University Press ANZ, 2015). She is a member and past chair of the Research Committee of the Psychotherapy and Counselling Federation of Australia, and is an editorial board member of the *Psychotherapy and Counselling Journal of Australia*. Her therapeutic practice is informed by the Common Factors and phenomenology research, gestalt psychotherapy, and intensive long term training in depth mindfulness. She and her partner teach meditation at their studio in Kihikihi, and with other groups in Aotearoa New Zealand, as well as online, and internationally.

Psychotherapy and Politics International

2024, VOL. 22, NO. 1, 1–32
https://doi.org/10.24135/ppi.v22i1.05

Online ISSN: 1556-9195 Journal homepage: https://ojs.aut.ac.nz/psychotherapy-politics-international

PEER-REVIEWED ARTICLE

Possibilities and limitations of anti-racist training within a counselling programme

Matthew Whitney,* **Gillian Proctor**,[1] **Divine Charura**,[2] **Tom Denyer**, and **Kat Wade**

[1] University of Leeds, UK

[2] York St John University, UK

ABSTRACT

This research presents a thematic analysis from the participants of a specific anti-racism session within counselling education in a university setting. The research team were a self-chosen subset of the participants, and the themes came from reflections of the participants at the start and end of the session. The three main themes are: defensiveness, openness, and engagement, and each also had sub-themes. These themes are discussed and recommendations for future anti-racism education are elucidated.

KEYWORDS: anti-racism; decolonisation; psychotherapy training; radical spaces

INTRODUCTION

The purpose of this article is to offer insight into the factors that determined the impact of an anti-racism teaching session within a professional training course in counselling and psychotherapy. The session aimed to help students on this programme consider their racial identity and what it is to be anti-racist. It also set out to examine the impact of racism in society and its relevance to themselves as therapists, their clients, and the therapy relationship. We hope our analysis and recommendations can inform the design of future sessions, maximising the course's potential to disrupt the centrality of whiteness (Downes &

*Contact details: matthewkwhitney@gmail.com

Taylor, 2021), the Eurocentrism of psychotherapy training (McKenzie-Mavinga, 2005), and rise to the ongoing calls to decolonise the curriculum (e.g., Charles, 2019).

We write as the tutor who prepared and facilitated this session (G.P.), an invited tutor (D.C.), and a group of students who were part of the student cohort on this programme (K.W., T.D., and M.W.). This is a follow-up to two previous articles, 'Beyond the "sticking plaster"? Meaningful teaching and learning about race and racism in counselling and psychotherapy training' (Proctor et al., 2021) and 'Listen with love: Exploring anti-racism dialogue in psychotherapy and counselling training' (Denyer et al., 2022). The first reflects on the same session the previous year. The second explores our reflective process, and the fertile discomfort and uncertain meeting that arose in our research group as we engaged with responses students had written to George Yancy's (2015) letter 'Dear White America'.

The majority of this article is a presentation and discussion of the results of a thematic analysis of data drawn from questions participants answered, in writing, at the beginning and the end of the session. We hope this analysis offers a robust way to understand the common elements that enable students to engage with and learn from anti-racism training and those factors that inhibit learning or development. Arising from this we make recommendations for future anti-racism sessions on the programme.

CURRENT GLOBAL CONTEXT OF BLACK LIVES MATTER PROTEST DURING COVID-19

To set the scene for this article it is important for us to note the current (2020–2021) global context in which we have seen a global awakening to the impact of racism discrimination and prejudice towards black and ethnic people all over the world. The murdering of Mr George Floyd (a black man) at the hands of police in the USA sparked widespread protests internationally, which signified a paradigm shift in the collective unconscious of communities, as evidenced by people from all ethnic groups coming to speak about this and wider racial and social injustice in society.

Being a part of society, in which the fibre of the tapestry includes social injustice, racism, and inequality, informs our desire for continued action for anti-racist and anti-discriminatory practice. Thankfully, over the last few decades there has been a continual and essential increase in those who have offered a much-needed critical psychological perspective and counter narrative to the mainstream discourse. To name a few, this includes writing on intercultural therapy and transcultural therapy (Alessandrini, 1998; D'Ardenne & Mahtani 1999; Kareem & Littlewood, 1999; Lago, 2006). It also includes Thomas (1992) writing on racism and psychotherapy, Miller-Loessi and Parker (2006) focusing on cross cultural social psychology, McKenzie-Mavinga (2009) on her writing on black issues in psychotherapy, and Moodley and Walcott (2010), whose perspectives cover

counselling across and beyond cultures. In addition, Lago (2011) edited a collection of chapters on transcultural therapy perspectives, whilst Lee (2013) did similar in relation to multicultural issues in counselling.

Whilst what we have noted here are only a few contributions to the importance of anti-racist training within counselling training programmes, there are a plethora of sources within the literature, some of which the students who participated in this module engaged with. This article aims to offer critical reflections and radical propositions which speak to challenge the systemic failure of attention to diversity in our counselling and psychotherapy training and profession at large.

Many of the counselling and psychotherapy professional bodies (United Kingdom Council for Psychotherapy [UKCP], British Association for Counselling and Psychotherapy [BACP], British Psychological Society [BPS]) have written public facing statements in response to Mr George Floyd's murder. There have been hundreds of responses from counsellors and psychotherapists responding to the impact they felt and also from many therapists from black and ethnic minority backgrounds who voiced experiences of racism, oppression, and tokenistic diversity sessions within counselling and psychotherapy training. Thus, through this article we offer perspectives which outline why we must all actively engage in action to address issues that are at the root of not only societal injustice and inequality in our society but also within our profession. These include inequality, racism, and the barriers to accessing or completing psychotherapy training. It is important for counselling and psychotherapy training to be truly anti-racist and produce qualified therapists who are culturally competent to work in a culturally and racially diverse world (Charura & Lago, 2021).

CONTEXT AND AIM OF THIS TEACHING SESSION

G.P.: I lead a module as part of the BACP-accredited MA in Psychotherapy and Counselling programme at the University of Leeds in the north of England, entitled 'Ethical and cultural issues in counselling and psychotherapy'. The majority of the teaching time (8 of 15 sessions) focuses on inequalities, identities, and power issues in therapy. The session that this article discusses in more depth covers racism and culture, and the aims are for students to consider their own identities with respect to ethnicity and experiences of racism, the relevance of this to working with clients of all identities, and how to take an anti-racist approach within the profession and society. This year was the second time I covered this subject. As a result of evaluating and discussing the session the previous year with students (see Proctor et al., 2021), I wanted students to think in this session about their own cultural identities and perceived ethnicity, and to problematise whiteness, not minoritised ethnic identities. I wanted whiteness to be decentred and students to explore decolonisation. I also

wanted students to have space to discuss the racialised dynamics within their own cohort. I had invited D.C., a black counselling tutor who had written on this subject in counselling to facilitate this session with me and we organised and prepared this session together. This was to ensure that students who experience racism would not feel alone in representing these experiences—a recommendation from the previous session evaluation (see Proctor et al., 2021). I felt it was important that I also facilitated as a white tutor although was also aware of potentially perpetuating white supremacist dynamics by my position to invite D.C. However, I hoped for an opportunity to model working together with respect and a de-centring and disrupting of whiteness, which was our shared aim. I (and many others) have had much experience of trying to discuss the dominance of whiteness in counselling contexts and wanting white therapists to take responsibility for thinking about our own heritage and how that impacts on our identities and relationships, rather than relying on (our few) colleagues from minoritised identities to educate us about the impact of racism, and in doing so I have encountered much defensiveness. I was particularly aware that the student cohort (of 22) was predominately white, with only three students of colour, so the experience of whiteness was dominant in the group. While I also encounter defensiveness in counselling contexts to addressing inequalities with respect to gender, I was aware there would be particular issues with a cohort where the dominance of whiteness was so profound. In relation to gender, this cohort was predominantly female, thus bringing a different dynamic. My main aim was to facilitate discussions, provoke thought on this topic, and loosen ideas rather than provoke defensiveness, hoping that students go away thinking it is a topic relevant to all of them and awareness of how much more work there is to be done to take an anti-racist stance.

Many resources were made available prior to the session and students chose a particular theme to research in advance of the session. During the teaching session, the first half of the session was an encounter style discussion with a couple of questions to focus the discussion ('Who are you in relation to your ethnicity and cultural background? How does this position you within this group and what is the impact of these differences within the group?'). After a break, students discussed with their peers in their theme groups for 20 minutes, then each group had five minutes to present their key points for consideration to the whole student group (16 students) followed by 15 minutes of whole group discussion. This process just fitted into the three-hour teaching slot (which included a 20-minute break).

A NOTE ON TERMINOLOGY

People who experience racism are not a homogeneous group. The terms 'people of colour' and 'Black and Asian minority ethnic' have been critiqued for erasing the multiple identities of the people who fall within those categories, while also creating a group that can be 'othered' within institutions and social structures (DaCosta et al., 2021). 'White' is also not

an adequate term to describe the variety of origins and backgrounds of those who can be racialised that way. Nonetheless, while staying aware of the power dynamics at play in who is applying what label to whom, it is valuable to have umbrella terms that help us discuss and conceptualise how racism functions. We are using a broad definition of racism, understanding it to operate at an individual, cultural, and structural level (Shiao & Woody, 2021). We have opted to use the terms 'people who experience racism' and 'people who do not experience racism' to delineate two broad groups in our society and the participants in our research in an attempt to avoid some of the issues mentioned above. We acknowledge these are unsatisfactory in so far as they are passive descriptors, suggesting a lack of agency, rather than an affirmative sense of identity. Within each group there will be diversity of racialised experiences, and for those who experience racism, it will impact their lives to different extents.

METHOD

Participants

All of the participants were students in the second year of the Psychotherapy and Counselling MA at the University of Leeds. The post-it notes were written anonymously so we cannot link responses to specific identities. In the overall cohort, 19 of the students were white and three were people of colour (one black, one black/mixed heritage, and one South Asian). Twenty of the cohort were women, and two were men.

Researchers

The researchers were volunteers from the same cohort as the participants, who had also taken part in the data collection prior to knowing about the research opportunity. There were five initial researchers who were present for data collection and analysis. Three identify as white, one as black, and one as South Asian. Three of the researchers are women, and two are men. Over the course of the project, two have left the team and we write as the remaining three researchers.

Procedure

- The student cohort were given three coloured post-it notes at the start of the session. They were asked to write 'anticipations', 'hopes', and 'fears' about the

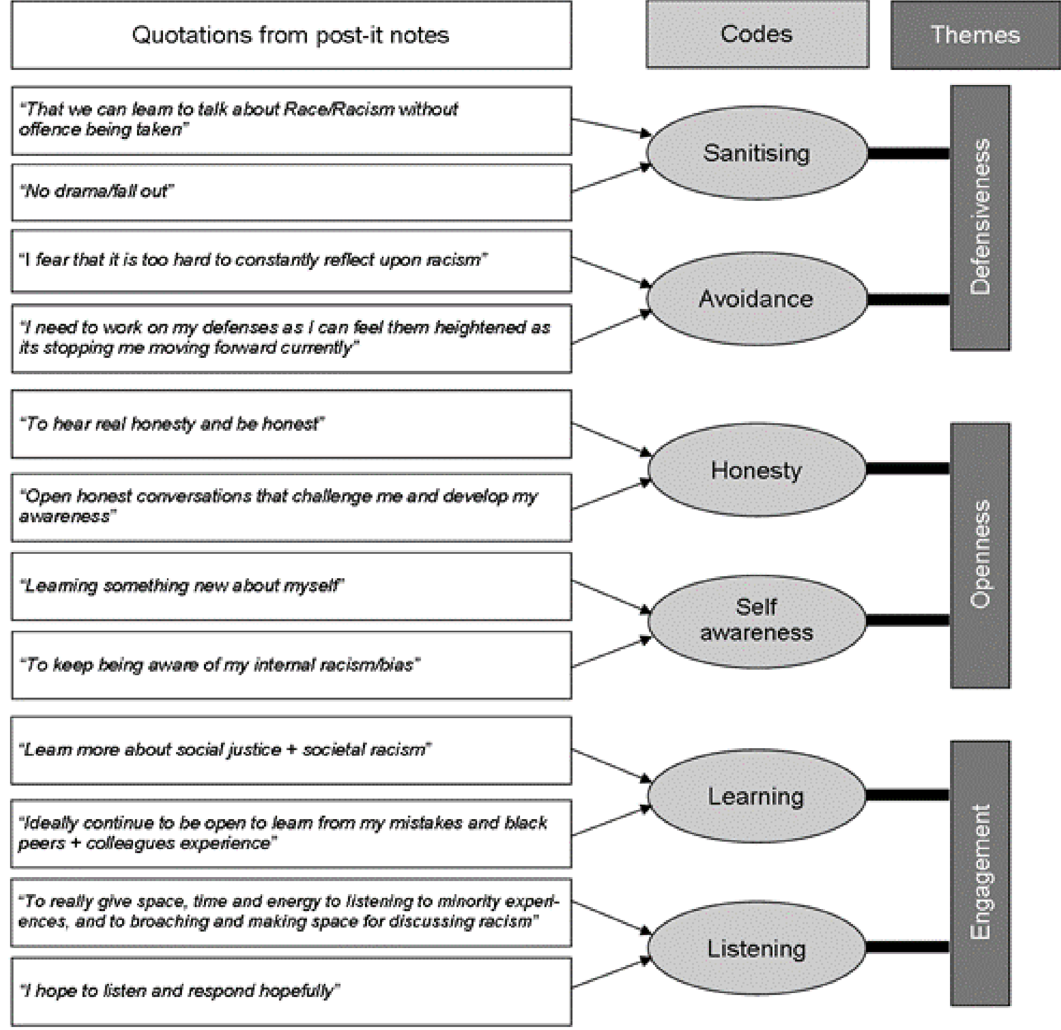
upcoming session, with each on a separate colour, and to stick them on the wall alongside the post-it notes of the rest of the class.

- The students were asked to do the same at the end of the session but under the headings of 'feelings', 'still feel stuck', and 'future action'.
- After the session the post-it notes were gathered into six categories under each heading and distributed amongst the researchers for analysis.

DATA ANALYSIS

We carried out a thematic analysis of these responses in line with the steps set out in Braun and Clarke's (2006) overview of the method. We used an inductive approach where the themes were decided by looking across the data for repeated patterns of meaning, in contrast to trying to fit them into an existing model or around a specific question (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Our epistemology is a realist one, where we're assuming we can theorise motivations, meaning, and experience in a straightforward way rather than looking beyond what has been written. The analysis has been a recursive process, moving back and forth between the dataset and our notes and write-up as we attempt to theorise the significant patterns and their broader meanings. The process started with coding all 123 post-it note responses into meaningful units of text. Units of text that shared meaning were then grouped together forming initial categories. The same unit of text could be included in multiple categories. Once this analysis was complete, we arranged the categories into themes. While carrying out this analysis and working on the Yancy response letters in our research group, we were differently but universally confronted by complex and sometimes painful reactions to the process and one another. We were learning together to navigate the dynamics we surfaced, and they were often in parallel with, or mirroring, the content of the work we were doing. Some reflections on how this was for each of us are captured below.

Figure 1. ***Example of Our Coding Process***



REFLECTIONS ON WORKING TOGETHER

K.W.: As a person of colour, specifically a mixed-heritage, black person of colour, this research has a deeply personal sting to it. I was continually aware of being caught in the dichotomy of feeling both part of the research group whilst also being other. There was something isolating about how deeply I felt wounded at times. When I think back on the beginnings of our time as a research group I can remember the anxiety that would surface before each meeting. Racism has penetrated my life and played such a significant role in many of my traumas that I was frightened to potentially expose these parts of my experience with others who cannot truly understand. The prospect of exploring racism with a majority white group was scary. It challenged me to express my feelings honestly, even challenging feelings such as anger or frustration. I found our group to be receptive to all

experiences, allowing for the differences in our opinions and experiences. Perhaps the biggest thing I have learned is that I would rather have an emotional, messy discussion about racism during which mistakes are welcomed and resolved, than the hollow and painful quiet as experienced during the university seminar. The acceptance I found in this group and growing confidence helped inspire the courage to further explore my personal experiences of racism as the topic of my master's dissertation.

M.W.: I am situated in a position of privilege, as someone who doesn't experience racism. Being part of this research group has been most personally meaningful when I've experienced moments of clarity where I realised another dynamic of racism and white privilege, my own or in wider society, and I felt excited, or tense, or ashamed, on high alert. Sometimes it's been when someone has shared their personal experience of racism and I've really felt their truth land with me. Other times it has been more specific to my role in the research, like when reading comments left by my peers and realising I have been racist, as in this article where the positioning has perpetuated the centring of whiteness and the white experience. In these moments I've become aware of a painful, defensive response in myself, scared of judgement, of being bad. Sometimes I've found a path offering myself some understanding and empathy around this response, and found some resilience to stay with it and own it. It has felt pretty special to be able to own this, process together the consequences and impact on me and others, and keep going.

D.C.: Reflecting on the research process has felt to me to be to be a duoethnographic process (Lund, Norris & Sawyer, 2012). My understanding is that duoethnographic encounter brings together elements of autoethnography, autobiography, self-study, life history interviews, and more. I agree with numerous authors who have suggested that effective duoethnography exploration does not simply facilitate the retelling of the past but rather questions the meanings about those narratives and invites reconceptualisation of our past and brings about new insights into the old stories (Breault, 2016; Lund, Norris & Sawyer, 2012). Being able to have dialogue with students about race, oppression, and discrimination of diverse communities, and discussing the changes in terminology in referring to those form minority groups was a positive experience. Furthermore, open discussion of issues of privilege and power, as well as the lived experiences, of those in the group who identify as black as well as the lived experience of those who identify as white in the group informed me of ways to facilitate learning within our profession. I have experienced the group as a place of learning for myself and of challenging myself and being challenged by others and have welcomed this.

T.D.: Reading and replying to Yancy's letter was a good preamble to our racism session because it challenged me to consider an internalised racism that I had never truly acknowledged. I tried my best to reanalyse my entire life experience and I didn't like what I saw. I saw my own silence in the face of racism and also my own racist thoughts, although I had never labelled them as such. What was wrong with me that I had not only engaged in this behaviour but also not even noticed it? Within our group, conversation flowed and we spoke about different aspects of racism; and this felt good, but it often felt like we were patting ourselves on the back while condemning our classmates. This in-group, out-group dynamic reinforced how difficult it is to have conversations about racism. I could recognise within myself a fear of being in the out-group. Sometimes it didn't feel ok to not fully understand or question why something was racist or offensive. Even now I can feel myself downplaying my thoughts so as to not fall into 'not getting it'.

G.P.: Meeting with this research group has been an inspiring and overwhelmingly hopeful experience for me. It felt like a place where I could share the responsibility of trying to have difficult conversations across different positions and identities about racism, privilege, responsibility, guilt, and ultimately the possibility of change through working together. I found our meetings provoked and furthered my thinking, gave me ideas, excited me, and encouraged me to present the dilemmas about facilitating discussions about racism in counselling education in wider spheres. I have felt so discouraged and culpable for the therapy profession being part of the problem, by ignoring and perpetuating systemic racism, that I have often felt overwhelmed and hopeless about the possibilities of change. This experience has also further clarified for me the enormity of the task ahead to create an anti-racist counselling training programme and to contribute to the furtherance of an anti-racist approach in the profession and in society. Nevertheless, this research group in particular and the allyship possible within our discussions has led me to feel much more of a shared rather than individual responsibility to address these issues. It has also led to my sense that the intrapsychic experience of shame is a collective experience that unites both oppressors and oppressed and the hope that this could be a collective starting point for mutual empathic psychological understanding, to build on societal understandings of oppressive structures and ultimately to lead towards transformation.

ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS

As researcher-participants, maintaining the anonymity of authorship of the data was not always possible due to our personal relationships with each other and the other participants. Some of the post-it notes were written by members of the research team and in that event, we had an agreement that we would not disclose this. Informed consent was

provided as the cohort were given details of research involving the post-it notes at the start of the racism session. All students had formerly consented for teaching sessions to be used as research experiences during their programme. Information was also provided about the right to withdraw data until analysis began. Our wellbeing as researchers could be affected given how personal, traumatising, and retraumatising anti-racism work can be for those who experience racism (Bryant-Davis & Ocampo, 2005). There is also the potential for 'recognition trauma' that people who experience racism, and those who do not, may go through (McKenzie-Mavinga, 2011). For those of us who do not experience racism, we are in agreement with Downes (2022), when he says that countering our white-centric universe 'requires giving up expecting the work to be comfortable' (para. 28). With this in mind, as a research group we strived to create the conditions where we could name and work with distress and discomfort as it emerged. Each of us also had in place personal therapy, which offered a space away from the group to process any distress.

FURTHER CONSIDERATIONS

As alluded to in some of the personal reflections above, being part of a mixed ethnicity research group meant confronting and trying to deal with the repetition of white supremacist and racist actions in the group and in how parts of the research were conducted and written up. Black members of the group had to experience, and then point out to white members of the group, some of the problematic ways they were participating in the work. Lorde (1984) describes this dynamic as 'a diversion of energies and a tragic repetition of racist patriarchal thought' (p. 3).

We have grappled with, and continue to grapple with, how in exploring the dynamics of racism as encountered in white individuals, we don't continue to problematically centre whiteness. We also want to avoid creating an interracial dynamic between differently racialised students, as opposed to a deepening connection between them (McKenzie-Mavinga, 2005). Our thematic analysis largely explores racism, and at the level of the individual. We hope in our recommendations, drawing on this analysis, we can offer applied anti-racist suggestions that go beyond the individual to the institutional level.

The data gathered on the day of the anti-racism session was submitted anonymously. The cohort was 85% white, so we know the majority of answers will have been written by students who don't experience racism. By gathering the data without knowing the racial identity of contributors, we are at risk of silencing the voices of people who do experience racism in the group as their comments are subsumed into the majority. In an attempt to mitigate for this, we have discussed the themes that arise from this anonymised data from the perspective of someone who experiences racism and from the perspective of someone

who does not experience racism. We hope that the dialogue between these positions strengthens the work.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Participants experienced a large range and intensity of emotions during the anti-racism workshop, reporting feeling 'exposed', 'heaviness', and 'guilt', as well as 'gratitude', 'connection', and 'love'. As we show, the intensity and range of affect is critical in understanding how the training was successful and where its impact was limited, and in informing how anti-racist training can be carried out on the programme in future.

We conceptualise three overarching themes that participants named or spoke to before and after the session. These are defensiveness, openness, and engagement. Within each of these themes there are sub-themes that help unpack some of the complexity of the results and show the hierarchy of meaning within the data.

We consider how each theme is relevant for participants in the session who experience racism, and for those who do not. This allows us to better understand the commonalities and differences for those groups in their experience of anti-racism training. We hope this will enable us to make more specific and valuable recommendations to ensure the needs of all who participate in anti-racism training are most fully met.

DEFENSIVENESS

The defensiveness of participants in the session was one of the main barriers to increasing understanding and awareness of racism and empowering students to think and act in anti-racist ways. One participant worries about 'slipping into a defensive response' and someone else says 'I don't want to be defensive'. It is identified as a block to their capacity to learn and as a state to try to avoid. Some participants were concerned with the defensiveness of the whole group or others within it. One student said they fear that 'people will be defensive and deny their role/part in the discussions'. Someone else hoped that 'people will be able to be honest and own the shit'. Another hoped 'we can swallow (or acknowledge) our defences'. Defensiveness is a key concern for participants who link group members' ability to work with their defences to the success of the session.

By defensiveness we mean modes of thought or behaviour, such as avoidance or denial, that help us avoid or manage the experience of challenging or intolerable negative feelings such as humiliation, guilt, or shame. Defensiveness is likely to stem from very different places depending on how participants are racialised and whether they have experienced racism or not. For people who experience racism, avoiding or denying racism exists might be

a way of denying difference and/or feeling 'othered', 'dehumanised', or 'less than'. In asking for participants not to be defensive, a person who experiences racism may be expressing a desire for safety in the group, to be heard and accepted in their experience of racism. This could be an articulation of the hope not to hear racist ideas being expressed or to hear people who don't experience racism minimise or deny its impact or existence, which could be painful or retraumatising. The potential for this to happen in a mixed racial group makes an anti-racism session a particularly vulnerable and exposing space.

For people who don't experience racism, some of the mechanics of defensiveness in the context of racism are sometimes expressed as 'white denial', 'white diversion', or 'white fragility' (DiAngelo, 2018). White denial is when the realities of white privilege and racialised inequality are either played down or entirely discounted. An example of white denial is 'focusing on very successful black people as a way of saying, look, they made it, therefore there isn't racial inequality' (Lowery, 2020, para. 12). The fear one student voices 'that people will excuse themselves from the conversation for being white' brings this into focus for our group. This student is overtly concerned that white participants won't acknowledge the way their privilege and white supremacy impacts on people of colour. It also points to a concern about the way that whiteness is normalised or constructed as outside of race, while minority identities are 'othered'. For those that don't experience racism it is very easy to simply check out from the conversation, while the spotlight is placed on those who do, potentially with an expectation to share and teach for the benefit of the majority.

Another way denial is enacted is when someone who doesn't experience racism highlights the hardships they faced *too* in response to hearing about racism. This is a way of minimising or denying that racialised discrimination is of particular significance or that they benefit from white supremacy. This is exemplified by the participant in our group who fears 'being othered or dismissed because of being part of a white minority'. This is not to deny that some white identities face discrimination, but to notice how raising it is used to side-step taking responsibility for racism and privilege.

Harris (2018), when discussing racism in New Zealand, explains white diversion: 'This is where, in instances in which facts about racism or colonisation are raised, the conversation is derailed through a claim that Māori themselves are guilty of some other wrong' (para. 25). It is similar to racist avoidance, which could be any behaviour that allows someone to avoid thinking about racism, feeling its impact, or confronting it. An example of this might be saying, or genuinely believing, that you 'don't see skin colour'. One participant showed awareness of this dynamic by hoping simply to 'not avoid'. The students who hoped for 'no drama/fallout' and that 'we can learn to talk about race/racism without offence being taken' can be understood to be hoping that the whole group avoids hearing anything controversial, challenging, or painful—that the group stays 'emotionally safe' or sanitises the exploration of racism. The person that hoped for a 'judgement free space (not optimistic)' and another who wanted 'to hear other people speak who may share similar

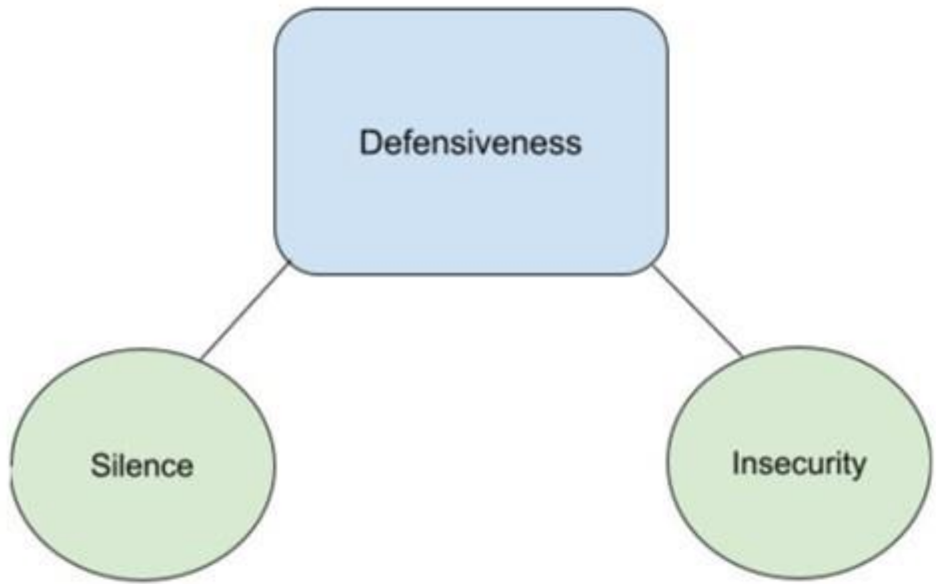
views to me' also can be seen as avoidant; shying away from confronting some of the more challenging dynamics in anti-racist work. If written by a student who experiences racism, this avoidance takes on a different tone, perhaps hoping not to hear racist ideas expressed in the session and wanting to feel allyship from other participants. The reasons a white student may want to avoid offence being taken in comparison to a student of colour wanting a judgement-free space really highlights the differing power dynamics between these two cohorts and the contrasting levels of vulnerability involved in participating in the session. One is not hoping their self-concept as a 'good' person to be exposed or challenged, while the other is hoping not to experience familiar discrimination.

DiAngelo's (2018) concept of white fragility has come to mainstream prominence, and encapsulates many of the above defensive responses. She explains it like this:

> It's the defensive reactions so many white people have when our racial worldviews, positions, or advantages are questioned or challenged. For a lot of white people, just suggesting that being white has meaning will trigger a deep, defensive response. And that defensiveness serves to maintain both our comfort and our positions in a racially inequitable society from which we benefit. (DiAngelo, 2018b, p. 1)

This is directly spoken to by a participant in the session who said they were still stuck on 'accepting my white privilege', while someone else mentions the 'layers that act as a barrier to me seeing my privilege'. Another participant overtly states 'I need to work on my defences as I can feel them heightened and it's stopping me moving forward'. If they do not experience racism, we can understand them to mean that they are in contact with their blocks around thinking or behaving in anti-racist ways, i.e., their white fragility.

Figure 2. ***Theme 1—Defensiveness***



Insecurity

The sub-theme of insecurity is apparent in the number of participants worried about 'getting things wrong' in some form or another. By insecurity we mean the relational experience of fear or discomfort that we are in some way not acceptable to ourselves or others, which often leads to defensive reactions. Participants worried about 'saying the wrong thing', 'being wrong', 'feeling unknowledgeable or offending someone', 'accidentally making someone feel uncomfortable/distressed', and 'offending/upsetting others'. A core fear that underlies these insecurities is vocalised by the student who mentioned their stuckness around 'not wanting to feel like I'm a bad person'. Here we see how denial and avoidance of racism are go-to responses to preserve a sense of being 'good' for fear of being implicated in being responsible for racism. For someone experiencing racism, a cause of insecurity might be that peers won't be able to accept them and stay grounded when they share their experience of racism within or outside the group, or bring any divergent opinions to the group.

The preoccupation of many in the group on causing offence or being perceived as stupid or ignorant suggests a lack of familiarity in engaging with anti-racism work or discussing racism. It also suggests a lack of knowledge or conceptual understanding of racism itself. This is highlighted by the student who is scared they might 'discover that I have both an unconscious or even conscious racist response'. Their desire to be blameless, or 'not racist', implies they have not understood how structural racism, racial inequality, and white supremacy impact on their own and all of our consciousnesses, or that they will be making

racist and anti-racist actions all the time, as the following quote illustrates. '"Racist" and "anti-racist" are like peelable nametags that are placed and replaced based on what someone is doing or not doing, supporting or expressing each moment. These are not permanent tattoos' (Kendi, 2019, p. 23).

A number of students feared 'being misunderstood'. If these comments were made by students who don't experience racism, it suggests a lack of confidence, perhaps alongside a skill and knowledge deficit, in how to appropriately and sensitively speak about racism. They aren't confident they have the vocabulary or skill to articulate themselves in a way that isn't racist or perceived as racist. This fear of judgement, humiliation, and blame from peers is acknowledged overtly by participants who are scared the session will involve 'shame', 'shaming and blaming', and 'confrontation.' Another person sets their goal as being to 'keep challenging the fear I feel about acknowledging my own internalised racism', that is, to overcome their insecurity of blame, negative self-judgement, or shame in order to better enact anti-racist thought and behaviour. For students who experience racism, being misunderstood, confrontation, shame, or blame may tie back into a fear that their experiences or contributions will be met with denial or hostility by those in the group who do not experience racism. They might have to find the inner resources to both witness and confront 'white fragility'. For all, this fear of judgement, or 'getting it wrong', goes some way to explaining why some individuals did not speak during the session, and why silence is so important to understanding how to run impactful anti-racist training.

Silence

Silence and its opposites—speech, participation, and conversation—are a significant sub-theme in our analysis. Someone at the beginning of the session identified they wanted 'to feel more confident to talk about race'. Another student raises it at the end of the session, still stuck on 'how to speak up' while someone else states their next step is simply to 'talk'. Members of the group were aware, to differing degrees, of how silence would impact the success of the session and their own learning, as well as the role silence plays in perpetuating racism. The reasons for participating or staying silent are likely to be different for people who experience racism in contrast to those who do not. Barbara Applebaum (2016) states 'white silence around race shelters white ignorance *and* innocence and thereby operates, often unwittingly, to maintain white supremacy' (p. 391). The participant who said 'I feel very conflicted about those in the group who stayed silent. Frustrated by them, and also interested in why they didn't speak' gives insight into how silence puts the emphasis on the experience of the silent. Silence has impact, leading to frustration but also a void, a question, an emptiness. We don't know why people don't speak and we don't know what they feel or believe. What we do know is that irrespective of racial identity, in not speaking up or out, silence perpetuates a racist status quo.

The need, desire, or expectation to contribute directly brought participants into contact with their defensiveness and insecurity, as shown by the student who feared 'feeling pressured to speak' and another who was scared 'I won't feel comfortable to voice my opinion'. Someone simply wondered 'whether we will be able to talk about it'. If expressed by someone who experiences racism who was in the session, we can understand this as expressing a hope for conversation, alongside a fear about sharing experiences of racism in a majority white group. People who experience racism need the space to process and explore their experiences, but to do so is exposing. In this case silence may be used as a defensive strategy. Silence may seem like a viable option to avoid causing ruptures in the status quo of the group as well as a way to avoid drawing more attention to the racial difference between peers. At the same time, silence can be alienating and painful for people who experience racism. They may feel pressured to carry the burden of the discussion on their own.

If articulated by students who don't experience racism, we can understand silence as being linked to and a function of racist defensiveness. Case and Hemmings (2005) describe white silence as a distancing strategy, a defence, that white students use to preserve their position as 'good whites'. Even once silence has been understood as a racist strategy, it doesn't mean individuals find it within themselves to speak. Indeed, this understanding may heighten insecurity. The person who says 'I wish I'd shared more about how I was feeling at the time' highlights this inner struggle. Silence remains a form of avoidance; a freeze response to that painful idea that, whether we experience racism or not, we are part of and implicated in a racist system.

One student was scared of 'not saying anything at all'. They are aware speech and participation are necessary in anti-racist work, but are unsure they or the group will overcome its blocks and defences. This is in contrast to the many participants who hoped for or anticipated variations on 'open conversation', 'powerful discussions', or 'heated debate'. The extent to which this was achieved in the session is a good indicator of the extent to which the session was successful. One person felt 'liberated because of the openness of the conversation', while, more modestly, another thought there was 'some success in sharing in the group'. Contrastingly, another participant said there was 'a long way to go towards a full conversation about race'. The group's judgements as to how well silence was overcome seem diverse. These differing assessments point to different levels of expectations, learning having been achieved, and differing conceptualisations about what a successful session would look like.

OPENNESS

Our analysis finds openness to be a central theme, and the degree to which it was achieved by participants is an indication of the effectiveness or impact of the training. The session challenged participants to be open, both with one another and themselves. Someone worried 'I will not be as open as I can be'. Others hoped 'to hear real honesty and be honest' and that 'we can all speak honestly and openly'. We understand openness to mean having the awareness to congruently notice what we are experiencing, to examine our implicit and explicit values and beliefs, and to observe how we relate to ourselves and others and to communicate some of this.

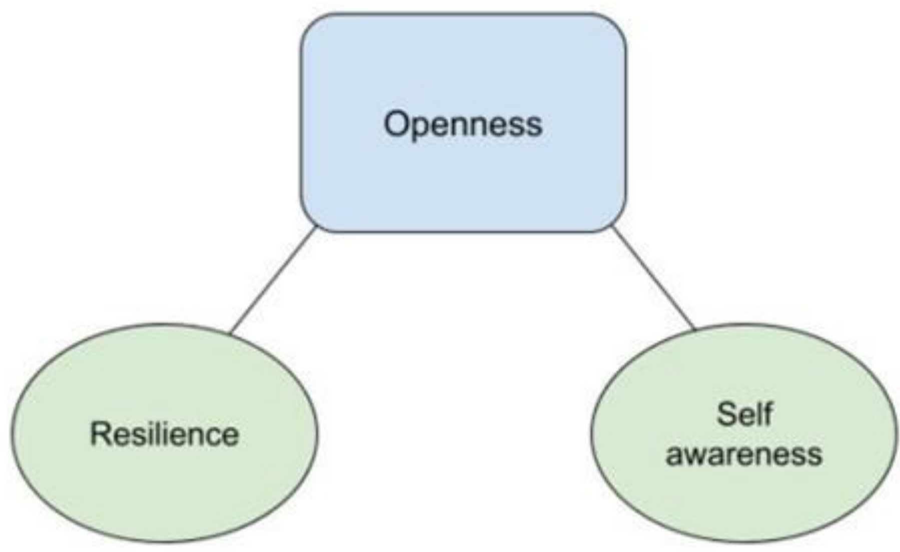
Once again, openness has different significance for participants who experience racism and those who do not. Will participants who experience racism be received by those who don't if they are open with their ideas, feelings, and experiences? Will they be able to stay open to hearing people who don't experience racism articulate themselves? Will people who don't experience racism be open to admitting or acknowledging their privilege and ways they benefit from and contribute to racism in society? Will people who experience racism gain anything themselves from their openness in this context, or just feel used to educate others?

Reflecting on the session, someone says they think 'the group has been relatively open about race as a subject' while another person says they feel 'liberated in some respect because of the openness of the conversation'. Both students identify openness as a progressive quality of the discussion, and both qualify their sense of the extent to which it was achieved by saying 'relatively' and 'in some respect'.

Openness has a two-person relational quality involving an expressive and receptive dimension. It encompasses honestly expressing ourselves to others, and being receptive to hearing and understanding others views and experiences. The participant who hoped for 'open honest conversations that will challenge me and develop my awareness' is leaning right into this dynamic aspect of openness. They highlight difficult self-enquiry and learning as well as pointing back to discourse and involvement as a critical mechanic of how anti-racist work can be effective.

Our analysis of openness highlights the sub-themes of resilience and self-awareness as interlinking attributes that participants in anti-racism training need in order to learn and develop anti-racist thinking and behaviours. Self-awareness isn't possible without the capacity to examine oneself even if what we find is painful or fails to match our existing self-concept. Resilience is a way of describing the attributes that allow us to do this, as well as to hear feedback, or to hear about others' experiences that give rise to uncomfortable or painful feelings. The aspiration of one student to 'continue to be open to learn from my mistakes' speaks to their willingness to assess and take responsibility for their past actions and then adjust their behaviour, exemplifying exactly this dynamic.

Figure 3. ***Theme 2—Openness***



Resilience

The session challenged many participants to be more emotionally resilient when engaging with their own racism and anti-racist work. By resilience we mean the capacity to stay in a well-regulated, open, congruent state when potentially stimulating, painful, or challenging ideas or feedback are being offered. Resilience can be contrasted to white fragility where the suggestion of benefitting from a white identity leads to a shutting down or defensive 'fight' response.

For people who experience racism, resilience takes on another dimension. It speaks to the ability to function in a systematically racist world, coping with microaggressions and explicit discrimination. In a session such as this one, it involves navigating triggers around past trauma and stretching to listening to and educating peers who don't experience racism. For people who experience racism, permission not to be resilient, but to be witnessed and heard in painful or defensive reactions could be an important part of the encounter work such a group does.

Resilience is sometimes understood as including the capacity to 'bounce back' from adversity or to 'positively adapt' following a challenge (Rose & Palattiyil, 2020). The participants who say they want to 'keep challenging the fear I feel about acknowledging my own internalised racism', 'to be more open to addressing racist tendencies in me despite discomfort', and be 'able to face myself' are all identifying their need to be resilient if they are to enact anti-racism in their lives. Another participant shows their awareness of their

lack of resilience, saying ‘it’s too hard to constantly reflect on racism’, and, assuming they do not experience racism, also neatly demonstrates white privilege in the ease there is in making that choice. This is another aspect of the dynamics of power in this work where people who experience racism have no choice but to engage with this experience emotionally, whereas people who don’t experience racism have a much greater choice to avoid the subject and the consequent discomfort entirely.

Self-awareness

Self-awareness refers to the capacity of becoming the object of one’s own attention (Duval & Wicklund, 1972). In this state one actively identifies, processes, and stores information about the self (Morin, 2011). Being prepared to look inward and develop self-awareness of unconscious biases, prejudices, and racist beliefs is central to the process of people who don’t experience racism developing an awareness of white privilege and of white racial identity. People who experience racism can also internalise and perpetuate racist ideas and biases, which can be harmful to themselves and others (Kendi, 2019). Ideally, this session aims to be a place where all participants can consider this in relation to their own experiences.

We found participants in the training frequently mentioned increasing their awareness and self-awareness. Sometimes participants challenged themselves to acknowledge their own racism. One wrote that they wanted to ‘keep being aware of internal racism/bias’, while another said they wanted ‘to be more aware of racist tendencies’. Another student mentions awareness in the context of defensiveness, wanting to ‘be aware of my defences’, linking defensiveness to their capacity to challenge their racist actions or ideas. For someone who experiences racism, this may link back to a desire not to react defensively to their peers who don’t experience racism.

For some, the session lacked this quality. One person commented ‘I feel like we’ve not really rolled our sleeves up and got into it, not owning stuff as much as we could, not challenging ourselves or looking inward’. Each individual’s capacity or openness to broaden their self-awareness will change and differ, so how anti-racist training accommodates students’ different levels of resilience or understanding will to some extent define how effective it is.

ENGAGEMENT

Many students reported being galvanised to keep engaging with anti-racism after the session. One participant says this is ‘continuous, not a one off!’. Another that they feel

'motivated and inspired to learn more'. Others say they will 'keep talking openly about racism' and that they feel 'empowered to not be neutral'. Students also named factors that inhibit them from continuing to engage. One names their insecurity, 'still stuck in fearing getting it wrong, though silence feels like the "most wrong" answer'. Another is confused and feels ill-equipped, asking 'What can I do? As a therapist but also as a white person of privilege where do I go from here?' and someone else names their sense of disempowerment, 'the issue of racism feels really big and overwhelming'.

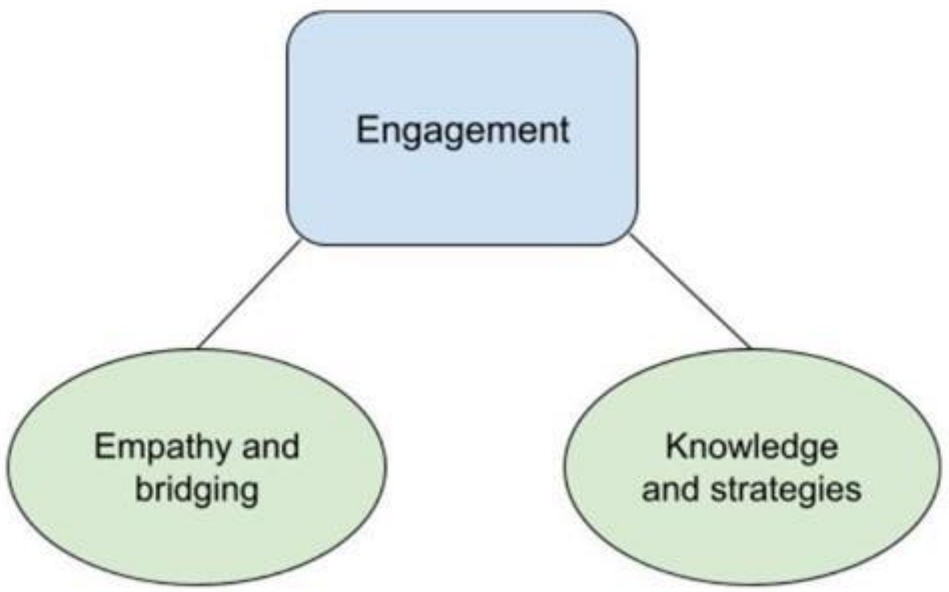
Our analysis shows that the group's focus in terms of their future engagement with anti-racist work is divided between a commitment to continuing to develop self-awareness and resilience, the 'hope to become ever more comfortable within my discomfort', a willingness to empathise and bridge (Givens, 2021),'to learn more about others' experiences to increase awareness', and a commitment to deepen knowledge about racism and learn the strategies to combat it 'to ensure I do continued reading', and 'develop knowledge and awareness'.

Staying engaged, or as DiAngelo (2018) terms it, having 'racial stamina', is necessary for those who do not experience racism to remain open to learning and growth. While openness, resilience, and self-awareness are all necessary for people who don't experience racism to start to challenge their racial privilege, they are not enough in and of themselves. 'White privilege' allows and enables people who don't experience racism to turn away from confronting it. People who don't experience racism have to engage, and stay engaged, in order to do this work and in order to make more than a tokenistic difference. As Saad (2022) puts it when exploring what it would mean to lose white privilege, it means 'continuing to show up, even when you are called out, you feel discomfort or fatigue, or you are not rewarded for it (socially or financially)' (p. 108).

For people who experience racism, engagement might mean seeking out opportunities for healing around racial trauma. This could be through being heard and validated in their experience of racism and its impact on them. It might be through learning approaches or finding tools to manage and respond to racism in a way that serves them, and that help maintain a centredness in the face of racism (Institute for the Study and Promotion of Race and Culture, 2015). This could take the form of a racial trauma response plan or developing daily practices to help in the face of racism. Engagement could also mean participating in anti-racism activism.

Our analysis shines some light on what factors help motivate students to engage in anti-racist struggle, as well as the dynamics that led to students turning away from the work. We see this in our sub-themes of empathy and bridging, and knowledge and strategies.

Figure 4. ***Theme 3—Engagement***



Knowledge and strategies

Some students directly named their need to learn more and their current lack of knowledge or understanding about racism, 'I still need to do more reading as I don't think I am fully aware of all issues around race'. One participant showed their lack of knowledge through the use of racist language: 'How to challenge my awareness further when with a coloured client', as well as acknowledging the need to broaden their self-awareness, even if they still don't know how to do this. Others feel inhibited as they aren't well versed in specific skills or strategies: 'How do I work with ethnic minority clients in the therapy room?', or stating they feel 'helpless in how I can help change occur'. Irrespective of racial identity or the experience of racism, a lack of knowledge about racism and helplessness around change processes blocks engagement.

In contrast to this, others found the session had increased their knowledge. Quotes included: 'Feeling more positive—understanding what I can do to challenge racism', 'guilt but empowered to not be neutral', and 'empowered with information'. The better a conceptual understanding students have of white privilege and racism, as well as learning more concrete strategies to act and think in anti-racist ways, the more empowered and motivated they seem to be to stay engaged. There is a question as to what this empowerment of people who don't experience racism would mean for people who do, or indeed who has empowered them, but it does seem to describe a coming out of a defensive attitude to starting to take responsibility (which accompanies power, see Proctor, 2017).

Empathy and bridging

For those that do not experience racism, having an understanding of racism, growing one's self-awareness, developing a white racial identity, and learning some anti-racist strategies does not necessarily stop the 'othering' or dehumanising of people of colour. People who don't experience racism giving space to and empathising with the experiences of people who do is a mechanism that allows 'bridging', 'reaching across to other groups and towards our inherent, shared humanity and connection, while recognising that we have differences' (powell, 2017, para. 17). Lorde (1984) says:

> Difference must be not merely tolerated, but seen as a fund of necessary polarities between which our creativity can spark like a dialectic. Only within that interdependency of difference strengths, acknowledged and equal, can the power to seek new ways of being in the world generate, as well as the courage and sustenance to act where there are no charters. (p. 110)

This is recognised, and felt, by some in the cohort in the workshop. One person says they are 'grateful for the powerful impact of hearing personal experiences as opposed to reading articles'. Another sees giving this space as a key strategy in their anti-racism work, 'take home message to really give space, time, and energy to listening to minority experiences, and approaching and making space for discussing racism'. Someone else recognises their personal responsibility to bridge, saying 'In the group I want to be brave enough to find out more about the experience of those different to me in terms of ethnicity and culture (everyone's)'.

Bridging involves creating and holding an empathic space. It is about a deep listening and a recognition of suffering. For people who experience racism it is a chance to be heard, understood, and seen. The primary function is not to educate others in the group, but to offer a space for acknowledgement, trust building, and connection. It also affords the chance to understand some of the dynamics existing for people who don't experience racism; insight that has the potential to be empowering and connecting.

However, if the empathy of people who don't experience racism for those who experience racism isn't coupled with resilience, it can give rise to an overwhelming cycle of guilt and shame. This can re-centre the white experience and continue to marginalise the experience of others. One student writes that they are 'still fearful, but trying to get past that. I don't want to wallow in my privilege', acknowledging the way that their fear keeps them stuck in a defensive, self-centring mode. White identified people can become confused and stuck about how to take responsibility for participating in and benefitting from a racist system. This can lead back to defensiveness, denial, or avoidance as a way of preserving their sense of being a good person. This seems to be borne out by the people who said, 'I fear it's too hard to constantly reflect upon racism' and 'the issue of racism feels

really big and overwhelming', on the assumption that those comments were made by people who don't experience racism. If made by people who do experience racism, we can understand them as a desire to find safety in not having to confront or be in touch with difficult feelings or trauma around their experiences.

Menakem (2017) writes, 'we cannot individualize our way out of white-body supremacy. Nor can we merely strategize our way out. We need collective action—action that heals' (p. 213). Collective action offers opportunities for empathy and bridging, a space to build the confidence to enact anti-racist acts and ideas. We've seen here that the more empowered students are, the more likely they are to engage ongoingly with anti-racist work.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Calls for multicultural approaches to counselling training (Locke & Kiselica, 1999) and training on multicultural counselling competence (Sue et al., 1982) have existed for some time, but can be easily contained into a single 'equality and diversity' module within a training programme, a non-performativity that can often reinforce rather than challenge white supremacy (Ahmed, 2012). Freire (1968/2017) and hooks (1994) have long offered postcolonial critiques of Eurocentric and hegemonic education practices, while contemporary anti-racist education in Britain and the USA criticises the liberal assumptions of multiculturalism by uncovering and dismantling the hidden power structures that are responsible for inequality and racism in institutions. In 2014, as part of a reenergised decolonising movement, students at University College London mounted a campaign asking, 'Why Is my curriculum White?', expressing their anger and frustration at 'the lack of awareness that the curriculum is white, comprised of "white ideas" by "white authors" and is a result of colonialism that has normalized whiteness and made blackness invisible' (Peters, 2015, p. 641). With Downes and Taylor (2021), we can imagine 'a curriculum that is informed by various branches of critical theory and related practices that embrace and recognise Black and brown subjectivities while decommissioning whiteness' (p. 89). It is in this spirit that we would like the learnings from this article to be applied. We believe this University's counselling and psychotherapy course has the potential to be part of dislodging whiteness. Within psychotherapeutic methodologies we are handed the tools to individually and institutionally practice anti-racism (see Proctor, 2022). Here, we make some recommendations that arise from our research that could be applied specifically to the programme we are referring to, with the hope they will be of some general use to other training programmes or educational anti-racist endeavours.

Reimagining the curriculum

A fourth wave of anti-racist work focuses on how to eradicate the subtle and pernicious prevalence of racism in a society where, broadly, an institutional and public position of racial equality is endorsed. Part of understanding this is in recognising that 'the unconscious mind is partially the source of today's *new* order of racial discrimination and bias' (powell, 2015, para. 5). Dual-process theories (Strack & Deutsch, 2004) in psychology suggest that implicit and explicit processes are supported by fundamentally different psychological systems, and that the implicit system is highly contextual and only changes in an enduring way after considerable time, effort, and/or intensity of experience. In terms of anti-racist work then, this explains why a 'one-shot' or single session method is unlikely to meaningfully bring about change (Devine et al., 2012). It tells us that in the design of this psychotherapy training, anti-racist work needs to be persistent and regular in order to have impact; the entire curriculum needs decolonisation. One way to achieve this is through integrating that work into a wide range of teaching modules. Psychotherapy is perfectly situated to do this given how widely accepted and evidenced it is, across modalities, that the person of the therapist, their being and presence, contributes to clients' improvement beyond the intervention. As such, psychotherapy training is almost universally geared towards guiding and supporting the personal development of prospective therapists, through reflective writing, personal development groups, and unstructured group time. These are fertile spaces for integrating anti-racism work. Below are a few specific examples of parts of the curriculum in which this could be done.

Our research points to an opportunity to integrate anti-racism work into the teaching of psychodynamic theory. We have shown how important addressing 'defensive processes' (McWilliams, 2011) such as denial, repression, and displacement is in the anti-racist work of people who don't experience racism. We know that unconscious, implicit biases are powerful determinants of behaviour precisely because people lack personal awareness of them (Dovidio et al., 2002; Gaertner & Dovidio, 2000). It is also well documented that they can occur despite conscious non prejudiced attitudes or intentions. The bringing into awareness of, and working with, unconscious processes and implicit bias via something such as the multifaceted prejudice habit-breaking intervention devised by Devine et al. (2012) could be integrated into the module.

Similarly, the module on intersubjective development is well placed to offer space for personal exploration of the origins of our racial identities, and how our understanding of those differently positioned from ourselves is limited. For students who experience racism, such consideration might help in acknowledging and validating experiences of racism and recognising the emotional toll it may take. It could facilitate work on how to navigate and cope with racialised experiences. Downes (2022) writes, 'Developing the capacity to "mentalize whilst white" is key to our work otherwise we continue to do harm and limit the potential of the therapeutic project' (para. 11). For students who do not experience racism,

understanding intersubjective development offers an opportunity to notice how their whiteness was constructed, and begin or continue the work of acknowledging internalised biases.

When the teaching focus is on trauma-informed psychotherapy and somatic approaches that focus on the mind–body connection, acknowledging and foregrounding work around racialised trauma is essential (Bryant-Davis & Ocampo, 2006; Fanon, 1961). Menakem (2017) writes, 'we will never outgrow white-body supremacy just through discussion, training, or anything else that's mostly cognitive. Instead, we need to look to the body—and to the embodied experience of trauma' (p. 43). Drawing on polyvagal theory (Porges, 2003) to understand how racialised trauma is stored, and considering the impact of intergenerational racialised trauma (Hankerson et al., 2022), allows a much needed focus shift to the experiences of students who do experience racism.

> If the normativity of whiteness is disrupted enough then we see it for what it is, a lie that serves as a strategy of domination with nothing remotely authentic about it. There is no transformation of bad whiteness into good whiteness—a return to our humanity is what is on offer, with a view to ceasing the violence of racism. (Downes, 2022, para. 16)

Downes' statement is a call for those who don't experience racism to see through the construct of whiteness and all it entails, and to drop into their humanity, an idea echoed by therapist and social worker Carlos Hoyt (2016): 'The only people who qualify as non-racist are those who defy and denounce the false logic of race altogether' (para. 4). This speaks to the person-centred emphasis on presence, and congruence, the 'accurate matching of experience with awareness' (Rogers, 1961, p. 282), linking closely to our themes of openness and self-awareness. Inviting students to notice 'what is true about ourselves?', to question and deconstruct racialised identities, to notice our biases, means teaching around core person-centred concepts can be part of integrating and normalising anti-racist work into the curriculum. Including teaching on Ubuntu philosophy, which argues that all students and colleagues can excel if their humanity is placed at the centre of their learning and if they feel a sense of belonging (Ukpokodu, 2016), and considering its application to therapy (Qangule, 2019; Van Dyk & Nefale, 2005) would offer complimentary and contrasting ideas to a Rogerian approach.

Empathy, understood as a combination of affective matching, other-oriented perspective-taking, and self–other differentiation (Coplan, 2011) offers the potential to give us first-person understanding of each other's experiences and perspectives. As discussed above, fine tuning our capacity for empathy is key to bridging, and staying engaged to work on anti-racism. Opening radical spaces in the classroom where we hold one another in empathy around racialised pain offers a beautiful possibility to move towards contact, bridging, and realising shared goals around accountability and allyship.

Creating safety for students who experience racism

A challenge for all anti-racism training is how to make sure the training is meaningful and valuable for participants who experience racism as well as those who do not. Insecurity is a theme from our analysis that indicates the need for anti-racism training to actively work to create a space of emotional safety for participants. In attachment terms, the training can offer a 'secure base' from which openness, resilience, and self-awareness can develop. Students who experience racism are quite likely to experience racism during the session, or may find the topic triggering, especially when working on the topic in a majority white group. It may be painful to realise how little understanding of their lived experience people who don't experience racism have.

To avoid repeating the patterns that exist in wider society, anti-racism training should be designed to prioritise the feelings and needs of people that experience racism rather than it falling on them to educate their peers. With this in mind, acknowledging how differently racially positioned members of the cohort are, and therefore how differently challenging the session will be is important. One suggestion might be to try contracting at the beginning of a session to establish the roles and expectations participants will take on. This could create the safe container for this topic that students who experience racism really need. The session could also begin with two separate groups, one for students who experience racism and one for those who don't, starting by understanding commonalities and feel allyship, before moving to a mixed group to aim to understand across difference.

Our reflections on creating safety for students who don't experience racism

There was a strong sense of willingness from some participants to learn more about minoritised cultures and to more deeply acknowledge their racism. Anti-racism training needs to be designed in such a way that an environment is created that offers enough safety for students who don't experience racism to be able to accept their 'white privilege' and allow into their self-concept an acknowledgment of their racism. At the same time, they need to be offered the opportunity to find, grow, and develop a strong white anti-racist identity. The course needs to help students develop the security to be able to accommodate the both/and of being both racist and anti-racist.

Silence and awkwardness when communicating about race were frequently mentioned in the data. It's clear that participants are not comfortable or used to talking about racism and anti-racism. We also saw that a sense of confusion or uncertainty about next steps or how to practically effect change was present for some participants. Many may not have the confidence, vocabulary, or ideas to challenge racism when we hear or see it, and may not know how to respond to or support someone who has experienced racism both in the moment of discrimination or more widely. A specific focus on what to communicate and

what not to communicate, and the opportunity to practise this communication in a safe environment would give participants a concrete takeaway from a session.

CONCLUSION

Counselling courses have the potential to be at the forefront of efforts to decolonise the curriculum and to put in place visionary programmes for exploring our racialised identities, deconstructing them, and creating an anti-racist praxis. Counselling courses must create the fertile conditions which allow for real openness, self-reflection, and resilience in their participants in order for anti-racist work to succeed. They need to offer continuous opportunities to engage on issues of race in an empathic, embodied, and collective way. They need to offer knowledge and strategies both for people who do and people who do not experience racism, to think and act in anti-racist ways. Courses need to create equal space for the needs of minoritised students (McKenzie-Mavinga, 2005), for example, giving students who experience racism the opportunity to reflect on how to improve their counselling of clients who do not, rather than simply the reverse (Rooney et al., 1998). Courses need to allow students who experience racism separate spaces to meet in, and make sure those spaces are well supported. Programmes need to integrate non-Western traditions and perspectives on psychotherapy, including thinkers from outside the Eurocentric canon. Perhaps then, the profession of counselling psychotherapy and professional training can be more congruent with the hopes of many of us who enter this profession; to challenge inequalities and work towards social justice.

REFERENCES

Ahmed, S. (2012). *On being included: Racism and diversity in institutional life*. Duke University Press. https://doi.org/10.2307/j.ctv1131d2g

Alessandrini, A.C. (Ed.). (1998). *Frantz Fanon: Critical perspectives*. Routledge. https://doi.org/10.4324/9780203979501

Applebaum, B. (2016). 'Listening silence' and its discursive effects. *Educational Theory*, *66*(3), 389–404. https://doi.org/10.1111/edth.12172

Braun, V., & Clarke, V. (2006). Using thematic analysis in psychology. *Qualitative Research in Psychology*, *3*(2), 77–101. https://doi.org/10.1191/1478088706qp063oa

Breault, R. (2016). Emerging Issues in Duoethnography. *International Journal of Qualitative Studies in Education.* 29. 10.1080/09518398.2016.1162866.

Bryant-Davis, T., & Ocampo, C. (2005). Racist incident-based trauma. *The Counseling Psychologist*, *33*(4), 479–500. https://doi.org/10.1177/0011000005276465

Bryant-Davis, T., & Ocampo, C. (2006). A therapeutic approach to the treatment of racist-incident-based trauma. *Journal of Emotional Abuse*, *6*(4), 1–22. https://doi.org/10.1300/J135v06n04_01

Case, K. A., & Hemmings, A. (2005). Distancing strategies: White women preservice teachers and antiracist curriculum. *Urban Education*, *40*(6), 606–626. https://doi.org/10.1177/0042085905281396

Charles, M. (2019). Effective teaching and learning: Decolonizing the curriculum. *Journal of Black Studies*, *50*(8), 731–766. https://doi.org/10.1177/0021934719885631

Charura, D., & Lago, C. (2021). Towards a decolonised psychotherapy research and practice. In D. Charura & C. Lago (Eds.), *Black identities + white therapies: Race, respect + diversity* (pp. 185–198). PCCS Books.

Coplan, A., & In Goldie, P. (2011). *Empathy: Philosophical and psychological perspectives*

Dacosta, C., Dixon-Smith, S., & Singh, G. (2021). *Beyond BAME: Rethinking the politics, construction, application, and efficacy of ethnic categorization*. Higher Education Research Action Group. https://pureportal.coventry.ac.uk/files/41898015/Beyond_BAME_final_report.pdf

D'Ardenne, P., & Mahtani, A. (1999). *Transcultural counselling in action*. SAGE Publications.

Denyer, T., Wade, K., Whitney, M., Charura, D., & Proctor, G. (2022). 'Listen with love': Exploring anti-racism dialogue in psychotherapy and counselling training. *Psychotherapy & Politics International*, *20*(1 & 2). https://doi.org/10.24135/ppi.v20i1and2.06

Devine, P. G., Forscher, P. S., Austin, A. J., & Cox, W. T. (2012). Long-term reduction in implicit race bias: A prejudice habit-breaking intervention. *Journal of Experimental Social Psychology*, *48*(6), 1267–1278. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jesp.2012.06.003

DiAngelo, R. (2018a). *White fragility: Why it's so hard for white people to talk about racism*. Beacon Press.

DiAngelo, R. (2018b). *So, what is white fragility?* https://www.robindiangelo.com/wp-content/uploads/2018/08/zeit-campus-transcript.pdf

Downes, R. (2022). *Complicating the white therapist: Decommissioning whiteness in therapeutic practice and thought.* https://robertdownes.substack.com/p/complicating-the-white-therapist

Downes, R., & Taylor, F. (2021). Re-imagining the space and context for a therapeutic curriculum—A sketch. In D. Charura & C. Lago (Eds.), *Black Identities + White Therapies: Race, Respect + Diversity.* (pp. 88–97). PCCS Books.

Dovidio, J. F., Gaertner, S. L., Kawakami, K., & Hodson, G. (2002). Why can't we just get along? Interpersonal biases and interracial distrust. *Cultural Diversity & Ethnic Minority Psychology*, *8*(2), 88–102. https://doi.org/10.1037/1099-9809.8.2.88

Duval, S., & Wicklund, R. A. (1972). *A theory of objective self awareness*. Academic Press.

Fanon, F. (1961). *The wretched of the earth*. Penguin.

Freire, P. (2017). *Pedagogy of the oppressed*. Penguin Classics. (Original work published 1968)

Gaertner, S. L., & Dovidio, J. F. (2000). The aversive form of racism. In C. Stangor (Ed.), *Stereotypes and prejudice: Essential readings* (pp. 289–304). Psychology Press.

Givens, T. E. (2021). *Radical Empathy: Finding a Path to Bridging Racial Divides* (1st ed.). Bristol University Press. https://doi.org/10.2307/j.ctv1d82h97

Hankerson, S. H., Moise, N., Wilson, D., Waller, B. Y., Arnold, K. T., Duarte, C., Lugo-Candelas, C., Weissman, M. M., Wainberg, M., Yehuda, R., & Shim, R. (2022). The intergenerational

impact of structural racism and cumulative trauma on depression. *The American Journal of Psychiatry*, *179*(6), 434–440. https://doi.org/10.1176/appi.ajp.21101000

Harris, M. (2018, June 10). *Racism and white defensiveness in Aotearoa: A pākehā perspective*. E-Tangata. https://e-tangata.co.nz/comment-and-analysis/racism-and-white-defensiveness-in-aotearoa-a-pakeha-perspective/

hooks, b. (1994). *Teaching to transgress: Education as the practice of freedom*. Routledge.

Hoyt, C. (2016, December 15). *Mean, kind or non: Which type of racist are you?* https://www.wbur.org/cognoscenti/2016/12/15/race-and-racism-carlos-hoyt

Institute for the Study and Promotion of Race and Culture. (2015). *Racial trauma is real*. https://www.bc.edu/content/dam/bc1/schools/lsoe/sites/isprc/racialtraumaisreal.pdf

Kareem, J., & Littlewood, R. (Eds.). (1999). *Intercultural therapy: Themes, interpretations and practice* (2nd ed.). Blackwell Science.

Kendi, I. (2019). *How to be an antiracist*. Bodley Head.

Lago, C. (2006). *Race, culture and counselling* (2nd ed.). Open University Press.

Lago, C. (2011). *The handbook of transcultural counselling and psychotherapy*. Open University Press.

Lee, C. C. (Ed.). (2013). *Multicultural issues in counseling: New approaches to diversity* (4th ed.). American Counseling Association.

Locke, D. C., & Kiselica, M. S. (1999). Pedagogy of possibilities: Teaching about racism in multicultural counseling courses. *Journal of Counseling and Development*, *77*(1), 80–86. https://doi.org/10.1002/j.1556-6676.1999.tb02424.x

Lorde, A. (1984). The master's tools will never dismantle the master's house. In *Sister outsider: Essays and speeches* (pp. 110–114). Crossing Press.

Lowery, B., with Mills, K. (Host). (2020). *The invisibility of white privilege, with Brian Lowery, PhD. Episode 110. Speaking of psychology* [Podcast]. American Psychological Association. https://www.apa.org/news/podcasts/speaking-of-psychology/white-privilege

McKenzie-Mavinga, I. (2005). Understanding black issues in postgraduate counsellor training. *Counselling and Psychotherapy Research*, *5*(4), 295–300. https://doi.org/10.1080/14733140500492581

McKenzie-Mavinga, I. (2009). *Black issues in the therapeutic process*. Palgrave Macmillan. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-1-137-19979-9

McKenzie-Mavinga, I. (2011). *The concept of recognition trauma and emerging from the hurt of racism*. Black, African and Asian Therapy Network.https://www.baatn.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/The-concept-of-Recognition-Trauma-and-emerging-from-the-hurt-of-racim-Paper-1-1.pdf

McWilliams, N. (2011). *Psychoanalytic diagnosis: Understanding personality structure in the clinical process* (2nd ed.). Guilford Press.

Menakem, R. (2017). *My grandmother's hands*. Central Recovery Press.

Miller-Loessi, K., & Parker, J. N. (2006). Cross-cultural social psychology. In J. Delamater (Ed.), *Handbook of social psychology* (pp. 529–553). https://doi.org/10.1007/0-387-36921-X_21

Moodley, R., & Walcott, R. (Eds.). (2010). *Counseling across and beyond cultures: Exploring the work of Clemmont E. Vontress in clinical practice*. University of Toronto Press. https://doi.org/10.3138/9781442660267

Morin, A. (2011). Self-awareness part 1: Definition, measures, effects, functions, and antecedents: Self-awareness. *Social and Personality Psychology Compass*, *5*(10), 807–823. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1751-9004.2011.00387.x

Lund, D., Sawyer, R. D., & Norris, J. (Eds.). (2012). *Duoethnography: Dialogic methods for social, health, and educational research.* Left Coast Press.

Peters, M. (2015). Why is my curriculum white? *Educational Philosophy and Theory*, *47*(7), 641–646. https://doi.org/10.1080/00131857.2015.1037227

Porges, S. W. (2003). The polyvagal theory: Phylogenetic contributions to social behavior. *Physiology & Behavior*, *79*(3), 503–513. https://doi.org/10.1016/S0031-9384(03)00156-2

powell, j. a. (2015, May 19). *Understanding our new racial reality starts with the unconscious*. Greater Good Magazine. https://greatergood.berkeley.edu/article/item/understanding_our_new_racial_reality_starts_with_the_unconscious

powell, j. a. (2017, 8 November). Us vs them: The sinister techniques of 'othering'—and how to avoid them. *The Guardian*. https://www.theguardian.com/inequality/2017/nov/08/us-vs-them-the-sinister-techniques-of-othering-and-how-to-avoid-them

Proctor, G. (2017). *The dynamics of power in counselling and psychotherapy: Ethics, politics and practice* (2nd ed.). PCCS Books.

Proctor, G. (2022): Diversity in counselling & psychotherapy. *European Journal of Psychotherapy & Counselling*, *25*(1-2), 198–209. https://doi.org/10.1080/13642537.2022.2156157

Proctor, G., Smith, L., & Akondo, D. (2021). Beyond the 'sticking plaster'? Meaningful teaching and learning about race and racism in counselling and psychotherapy training. *Psychotherapy and Politics International*, *19*(2), e1580. https://doi.org/10.1002/ppi.1580

Qangule, L. S. (2019). *An investigation of the experiences of psychotherapists regarding uBuntu in their psychotherapy practice: An interpretative phenomenological analysis* [Doctoral thesis, Rhodes University]. https://core.ac.uk/download/pdf/323918019.pdf

Rogers, C. R. (1961). *On becoming a person: A therapist's view of psychotherapy*. Constable.

Rooney, S. C., Flores, L. Y., & Mercier, C. A. (1998). Making multicultural education effective for everyone. *The Counseling Psychologist*, *26*(1), 22–32. https://doi.org/10.1177/0011000098261002

Rose, S., & Palattiyil, G. (2020). Surviving or thriving? Enhancing the emotional resilience of social workers in their organisational settings. *Journal of Social Work*, *20*(1), 23–42. https://doi.org/10.1177/1468017318793614

Saad, L. (2022). *Me and white supremacy*. Sourcebooks Explore.

Shiao, J., & Woody, A. (2021). The meaning of 'racism'. *Sociological Perspectives*, *64*(4), 495–517. https://doi.org/10.1177/0731121420964239

Strack, F., & Deutsch, R. (2004). Reflective and impulsive determinants of social behavior. *Personality and Social Psychology Review*, *8*(3), 220–247. https://doi.org/10.1207/s15327957pspr0803_1

Sue, D. W, Bernier, J. E., Durran, A., Feinberg, L., Pedersen, P., Smith, E. J., & Vasquez-Nuttall, E. (1982). Position paper: Cross-cultural counseling competencies. *The Counseling Psychologist*, *10*(2), 45–52. https://doi.org/10.1177/0011000082102008

Thomas, L. (1992). Racism and psychotherapy: Working with racism in the consulting room—an analytic view. In J. Kareem &R. Littlewood (Eds.), *Intercultural Therapy* (pp. 133–145). Blackwell Scientific Publications.

Ukpokodu, O. N. (2016). *You can't teach us if you don't know us: Becoming an Ubuntu, responsive and responsible urban teacher.* Peter Lang Publishing.
Van Dyk, G. A. J., & Nefale, M. C. (2005). The split-ego experience of Africans: Ubuntu therapy as a healing alternative. *Journal of Psychotherapy Integration*, *15*(1), 48–66. https://doi.org/10.1037/1053-0479.15.1.48
Yancy, G. (2015, December 24). Dear white America. *The New York Times*. https://archive.nytimes.com/opinionator.blogs.nytimes.com/2015/12/24/dear-white-america/

AUTHOR BIOGRAPHIES

Matthew Whitney is an integrative counsellor with the British Association of Counselling and Psychotherapy. Having graduated with distinction from the postgraduate diploma in counselling and psychotherapy at the University of Leeds, he now lives and works in Mid Wales. He also works as a facilitator and mediator for individuals and groups in conflict.

Dr Gillian Proctor is a lecturer in counselling and psychotherapy at the University of Leeds, UK. She is also an independent clinical psychologist and person-centred psychotherapist. She worked with clients in the NHS (National Health Service) for 22 years before entering academia. She has written and edited numerous books, chapters, and articles particularly on the themes of ethics, politics, and power in counselling. She is passionate about negotiating complexity without reduction, dialogue with others, and among the spheres of internal psyches, the social, and the political.

Dr Divine Charura is a professor of counselling psychology at York St John University (England). He is a practitioner psychologist and counselling psychologist and is registered with the Health and Care Professions Council in England. Divine is also an honorary fellow of the United Kingdom Council for Psychotherapy and an adult psychotherapist. Divine's research and therapeutic interest

is in psychological trauma and mental wellbeing across the lifespan. He has worked in different international contexts. He has co-authored and edited numerous books in counselling, psychology, and psychotherapy. As a psychologist and educator, Divine's pedagogical interests are in integrative, reflective, and inquiry-based learning, and constructivist and decolonial pedagogy. Divine has co-authored and edited a number of books in counselling, psychology, and psychotherapy. These include *Love and Therapy: In Relationship* (co-edited with Stephen Paul, Routledge, 2015) and with Colin Lago has co-edited the following books: *The Person-Centred Counselling and Psychotherapy Handbook: Origins, Developments and Current Applications* (Open University Press, 2016) and *Black Identities + White Therapies: Race, respect + diversity* (PCCS Books, 2021). https://ray.yorksj.ac.uk/profile/2104

Tom Denyer is a psychotherapist and counsellor with the British Association for Counselling and Psychotherapy. Tom has recently completed his diploma in psychotherapy and counselling and is currently completing his master's degree, conducting research exploring student experiences of transitioning to remote work due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Tom currently works as a psychotherapist in private practice.

Kat Wade is a psychotherapist and counsellor with the British Association for Counselling and Psychotherapy. Coming from a background working in mental health crisis, they have recently completed their master's degree in psychotherapy and counselling with the University of Leeds. Kat currently works as a psychotherapist in private practice and at a children and young person's charity. As a black, mixed-heritage individual, they have a particular passion for racial trauma, a topic which provided the basis for their master's thesis.

Psychotherapy and Politics International

2024, VOL. 22, NO. 1, 1–25
https://doi.org/10.24135/ppi.v22i1.06

Online ISSN: 1556-9195 Journal homepage: https://ojs.aut.ac.nz/psychotherapy-politics-international

PEER-REVIEWED ARTICLE

Parrhesia as therapy in 'fragile times'

Bert Olivier * Department of Philosophy, University of the Free State, South Africa

ABSTRACT

This article approaches the question of the relation between *parrhesia* (truth-telling or truth-speaking) and (self-)empowerment from the perspective of Michel Foucault's resurrection of the ancient Greek concept and practice by that name. This is done to be able to negotiate the present global terrain where there appears to be a dearth of such truth-telling, and an abundance of obfuscation, judging by the available evidence. A distinction is made between 'truth' and 'truth-speaking', to highlight the fact that *parrhesia* is not a theory of truth, before a negotiation of Foucault's text—interspersed with references to other texts and practices—is embarked upon. Foucault took pains to distinguish *parrhesia* as truth-speaking from instances where one is indeed speaking the truth to an audience or a friend, such as where a lecturer in linguistics is telling her students the truth about linguistic theories. By contrast, *parrhesia* does not merely instantiate speaking the truth in such a safe, innocuous manner; it involves speaking truth under circumstances where courage in the face of danger is involved—either because one is telling a valued friend the barefaced truth about what is required from them to rescue your mutual friendship (which does not concern me here), or because you are speaking the truth in public and to powerful others, under dangerous circumstances where you take a significant risk by doing so. This, as well as the manifestation of evil, today, is elaborated on before the question is posed: what, if any, therapeutic consequences does such risky truth-telling have for the speaker, and by implication also for the listener(s)? This is pursued in light of Foucault's observation, that the truth-teller or *parrhesiastes* takes up a specific relationship to herself—one which is a manifestation of her refusal to be false to herself. This, it is argued, has demonstrable ethical and therapeutic value for the truth-speaker as well as, potentially, for at least some of those who witness the act of truth-telling. In the final analysis it is a practice that cultivates a sense of autonomy and community during 'fragile times', such as the present.

KEYWORDS: autonomy; Foucault; parrhesia; risk; truth-speaking

*Contact details: OlivierG1@ufs.ac.za

> I only know that there have not been many philosophies, since this point in time, that do not revolve around the question: 'Who are we at present? What are, therefore, these very fragile times from which we cannot detach our identity and which will carry it along with them?' (Michel Foucault, 2007, in *The Politics of Truth*, p. 121)

INTRODUCTION: A QUESTION FOR OUR TIME

In response to a question by André Berten about the 'driving force' of his thinking (in *The Politics of Truth*), Michel Foucault says:

> It seems to me that if there is a certain coherence in what I do, it is perhaps linked to a situation in which we all find ourselves, far more than a basic intuition or a systematic thinking. This has been true since Kant asked the question '*Was ist Aufklarung?*' that is, what is our own actuality, what is happening around us, what is our present. It seems to me that philosophy acquired a new dimension here. Moreover, it opened up a certain task that philosophy had ignored or didn't know even existed beforehand, and that is to tell us who we are, what our present is, what that is, today. (2007, pp. 129–130)

I wonder if Foucault, had he lived in the present 'fragile times', would have said the same thing, because nothing is clearer to me than that, today, we live in an era of obfuscation, no matter how hard some of us are trying to bring some enlightenment (back) into it. I do not want to write at length about the pervasive signs of such obfuscation here, although such conspicuous signs can be, and have been addressed by some individuals who are trying to lift the obfuscating veil by writing 'the truth' in a sense that will be clarified below (Kennedy, 2021, 2022; Malone, 2022, 2023; Olivier, 2022a; 2022b; 2022c; 2023a; 2023c; Wolf, 2022). Suffice to state that the present marks a time of major upheavals in civilisational history, of which the advent of the so-called COVID-19 global 'pandemic' has been the most conspicuous manifestation, although the 2008 financial crisis may be placed in the same continuum of events. In this global context, the people of the world are at the mercy, largely (but not exclusively), of powerful media companies that disseminate officially sanctioned and coordinated, but misleading, news and opinion pieces about all aspects pertaining to the 'pandemic', the conflict in Ukraine and most recently in Israel and Gaza, as if in an echo chamber. Fortunately, the internet—as *pharmakon* (simultaneously poison *and* cure) – which makes this mainstream media hegemony possible, also enables alternative news sources to

circulate otherwise mercilessly censored news and critical analyses, with the result that one is witness to an information and communication-*differend* (Olivier, 2021) on an unprecedented scale. It is no exaggeration to say that we are in the throes of an information war, more fundamentally than its 'hot war' manifestations.

The incommensurability of views and beliefs characterising the informational and communicational exchange in contemporary media on various aspects of the 'pandemic', as well as other issues, is demonstrably directly related to the attempt, by a group of globalist technocrats, to bring about a worldwide totalitarian regime (see Grand Jury, 2022a, 2022b). Naomi Wolf, an exemplary public truth-speaker (*parrhesiastes*)—to be clarified below—sums up the first three years of this sustained, multi-faceted (would-be) global *coup d'etat* as follows:

> I had come to believe there was more afoot here than just human vanity, or culpability, or even conventional evil. Here was an infection of the soul, endured by so many in 2020–22. Here was the helter-skelter desertion of classical liberalism's—modern civilization's—most cherished post-war ideals; the sudden abandonment of post-Enlightenment norms of critical thinking; the dilution of parents' sense of protectiveness over the bodies and futures of their minor children; the acceptance of a world in which people can't gather to worship. We were faced with the suddenly manifested structures and their drivers, who erected this demonic world in less than two years and imposed it on everyone else; these heads of state and heads of the medical boards and heads of school boards and these teachers; these heads of unions and these national leaders and the state-level leaders and the town hall-level functionaries; all the way down to the men or women who disinvite relatives from Thanksgiving due to social pressure, because of a medical status which is no one's business and which affects no one. This massive edifice of evil, was too complex and really, too elegant, to assign to just human awfulness and human inventiveness. It suggested a spiritual dimension of evil. (Wolf, 2022, p. 253)

It is not difficult to see that this colossal, on-going assault on humanity—on our democratic freedoms, cultural activities, privacy, and physical as well as psychic wellbeing—makes a mockery of Kant's 18th-century belief regarding the 'age of enlightenment' (Kant, 2016; alluded to by Foucault, above), a time characterised by sustained debates on, if not always attempts to, balance freedom and equality (Baumer, 1977). Such (individual) liberty—and the universal right to it—has been enshrined, not only in the Charter of the United Nations in

1948, but also in the constitutions of many countries, for example those of the United States of America and of South Africa. Is there any semblance of freedom left? Anyone who believes this to be the case should reflect on the fact that everyone who uses a mobile phone or an internet-linked computer is subject to constant surveillance (Mercola, 2023) everywhere you go (except perhaps in the wilderness where there is no internet availability, and even there I would not be too sure). This is why investigative reporter, Whitney Webb, says (quoted in Mercola, 2023):

> *There's a huge need for to divest from Big Tech as much as possible, and it needs to happen* quickly, *because the choice is either participate in the system being designed for you by crazy people and become a slave, or don't become a slave. And if you don't want to be a slave, you have to invest now in Big Tech alternatives, unless you want to live a completely analog life...*
>
> *The easiest route is to go the slavery route, and that's how they've designed it on purpose. The whole selling point of that system is that it's convenient and easy. So, obviously, it's going to take some work to go the other route, but the future of human freedom depends on it so I think it's a pretty easy choice.* (paras. 61–62)

This choice is reminiscent of something from one of my favourite science fiction television series—Ronald D. Moore's *Battlestar Galactica* (Olivier, 2015). When the cylons (humanoid artificial intelligence robots created by humans) launch an attack on the planets inhabited by humans, killing 8 billion of them almost instantaneously, the aged 'battlestar'—the spaceship equivalent of an aircraft carrier today—named Galactica survives. Why? Because not being among the most state-of-the-art battlestars, it lacked the facility of constant communicational interconnectivity, and thus the cylons, who infiltrated all the other battlestars' on-board defence systems with neutralising viruses via the interconnected system, could not achieve this with the Galactica. There is some sense, now as in this instructive fictional series, *not* to be too connected, as Webb argues, above.

It may be an easy decision to make for Webb who, like Wolf (above), is also a (public) truth-speaker—something of which there is still a shortage worldwide; most people evidently don't find it easy to choose in favour of liberty, for understandable, but hardly forgivable reasons (much less to speak or write publicly about it). These reasons include repression in the psychoanalytic sense of an unwitting relegation, to the unconscious, of anxiety-provoking

events and experiences (Olivier, 2023c), such as growing evidence of mortality linked to COVID-19 (pseudo-) 'vaccines' worldwide (Redshaw, 2023). Small wonder that truth-speaking is in short supply; in the face of ostensibly overwhelming odds, few people have the courage to point out the proverbial 'elephant in the room'. Naomi Wolf (2022) comments as follows on this:

> This is truly a time in history for the hammering out of heroes and heroines in the forge of crisis. And so it is also a time of cowardice, when those who choose collusion, when they know better, are allowing their souls to shrivel in that same heat. (p. 264)

People who shrink back in fear from speaking out (or writing) in public against the monstrosity that is threatening our very humanity—as Wolf demonstrates in this courageous book—do not understand that courage is not the absence of fear. It is doing or saying what should be done and said *despite being afraid*. Truth-speaking (*parrhesia*) requires this kind of courage. So, what is it?

WHAT IS 'PARRHESIA' OR 'TRUTH-SPEAKING'?

Parrhesia—truth-speaking (or truth-telling)—is not the same as truth. At least not in the familiar sense of a correspondence between what is stated and the state of affairs to which it corresponds—the so-called correspondence theory of truth. Or, for that matter, the coherence theory of truth, which judges the truth of statements by the criterion of whether it coheres with the body of statements within which it functions. An empiricist epistemological approach would mostly adhere to a correspondence theory of truth, while a rationalist approach is more compatible with a coherence truth-theory. There are several other such theories of truth, for example the pragmatic theory of truth, which assesses truth in the light of what supposedly true statements *do*, that is, by their consequences for action (ancient Greek 'pragma': 'thing done'; 'act'; 'deed'). Then there is the more esoteric Heideggerian conception of truth, which he named *aletheia* or 'unconcealedness', as what must be presupposed by all other truth-theories. After all, one cannot assess correspondence between statements and states of affairs, or rational coherence, or implement pragmatic criteria unless that which one is assessing were already 'unconcealed', standing in the light of

cognitive accessibility. The point is, however, that these are *theories* of truth, that claim something putatively decisive about what *truth is* as quality of insights and statements.

Truth-speaking, truth-telling, or in ancient Greek, *parrhesia*, is something different. It is what one does when you speak the truth exactly *as you experience* or perceive it, with no euphemisms and no punches pulled. This does not mean that you necessarily have to call the proverbial spade a shovel (unless this is what it takes to get through to your interlocutor or audience), but you have to speak truthfully without holding back, that is, without any attempt at being tactful, which might blur what it is that must be said. This is particularly relevant for speaking (or writing) in public about something (potentially) controversial, where you run the risk of exposing yourself to harsh criticism and even outright denunciation (more on this below). It could even endanger your life, as David Webb (2023) intimates where he writes about having spoken in public about the globally planned 'grand larceny' (theft) pertaining to everything the world's people own, and subsequently being issued a thinly veiled threat by someone to whom he explained his findings. This is what he writes about his public presentations, which were conspicuously instances of truth-speaking, with all the attendant risks and dangers:

> The title of my presentation was 'Paradigm Collapse.' It was the first time I spoke publicly about the gutting of investor protections, including ownership rights to securities, and of the context for understanding why this was happening.
>
> I first spoke publicly in the U.S. about the subversion of property rights to securities at an investment conference in 2012. There was a tremendous response from the audience of some hundreds. When my time was up, there were shouts of 'Let him keep talking'. The organizers said that had never happened before. The conference was politically connected in some way. Their head of research told me that the CIA was certainly there. The next day there was an article in the online Wall Street Journal rebutting what I had said, but without mentioning me. (Webb, 2023, p. xxix)

That there were people in these audiences who had more than a passing interest in his topic, was confirmed to Webb later:

> Less than a month after speaking at that conference in the U.S., a man contacted me who asked to meet in Stockholm. He had been the Chairman of a U.S. political party, and had a long career

> related to the defense establishment. He stayed at a hotel within a short walking distance from my apartment. We had lunch. He suggested a pint of ale. He asked me to explain the subject of which I had spoken at the conference. I went through the evidence and implications. The odd thing is that he then asked no questions about the subject. Instead, he fixed me in the eye and said, 'Does your family know you are doing this?' He said nothing more; that was the end of the meeting. I paid the bill and left. Perhaps it had been a 'courtesy call'. We all have to die sometime, and being assassinated must be among the most honorable ways to do it. One must have been doing something right! Made a difference! No classier way to die, really. I always wanted to be like John Lennon! (2023, p. xxx)

Despite concluding this anecdote on an ostensibly cheerful, if realistic note, it is clear from his tone that Webb was fully cognisant of the dangers of exposing the truth, through truth-telling, about events—past or planned—that reek(ed) of criminality or malfeasance. This has always been the case. An obvious historical instance of such *parrhesia*, which requires courage in the face of power, is the self-defence of the archetypal ancient Greek philosopher, Socrates, who was prepared to speak the truth instead of honouring the 'gods of the *polis*' unconditionally, even when he could anticipate relentless hostility on the part of his Athenian audience. We should remind ourselves that, as exemplified by Socrates, the philosopher's task, by which she or he is recognised, is to question the things valued by the city; that is, they question convention. This is apparent in Plato's (1997) *Apology* where, referring to the charges brought against him, Socrates says to the members of the Athenian jury: 'It goes something like this: Socrates is guilty of corrupting the young and of not believing in the gods in whom the city believes, but in other new spiritual things' (p. 23). He proceeds by examining the charges systematically, and effortlessly demonstrates that he does believe in 'spirits', which an accuser admits to be 'gods' (Plato, 1997). He further argues that, having revealed that the accusations against him are groundless, he knows that his demise will be unrelated to this, because they are based on the fact that he is 'very unpopular with many people' who 'envy' him (p. 26).

The crux of his defence (*apologia*)—which did not endear him to the jury—becomes apparent where he remarks (Plato, 1997: 27) that the allegations against him would have been valid if he had forsaken his soldierly duty in the battles where he had fought, 'for fear of death or anything else… when the god ordered me, as I thought and believed, to live the life

of a philosopher, to examine myself and others…' (p. 27). However, fearing death, he further claims, rests upon the mistaken belief that 'one knows what one does not know'. As for himself, Socrates admits, he knows that he knows nothing of the things of the 'underworld' (including death), and he suggests that it is perhaps in this respect that he 'is wiser than anyone in anything' (p. 27). Small wonder that the jury would exercise its power over Socrates by finding him guilty and sentencing him to death. In his case the *parrhesia* he practiced clearly presupposed his awareness that he would be convicted and condemned to death. As I shall argue further, the courage Socrates fearlessly displayed when confronted by this virtual certainty, is an essential ingredient of *parrhesia*.

Parrhesia is also what you do when you feel obliged to tell a friend the barefaced truth about something that she or he has (not) done, or is doing, and which does not live up to the standards of friendship, honesty, or decency, and because you care for your friend and value your friendship, you nevertheless risk losing it by saying what has to be done to salvage it. However, it is not this kind of 'cruel-to-be-kind', friend-to-friend *parrhesia* which concerns me here, primarily, but rather the kind that sometimes, albeit rarely, occurs in the public domain. Michel Foucault (1999), in a rightly famous philosophy seminar—the *first*, presented as part of a series of seminars delivered in California in 1983—characterises it like this:

> In *parrhesia*, the speaker is supposed to give a complete and exact account of what he has in mind so that the audience is able to comprehend exactly what the speaker thinks. The word '*parrhesia*' then, refers to a type of relationship between the speaker and what he says. For in *parrhesia*, the speaker makes it manifestly clear and obvious that what he says is his own opinion. And he does this by avoiding any kind of rhetorical form which would veil what he thinks. Instead, the *parrhesiastes* uses the most direct words and forms of expression he can find. Whereas rhetoric provides the speaker with technical devices to help him prevail upon the minds of his audience (regardless of the rhetorician's own opinion concerning what he says), in *parrhesia*, the *parrhesiastes* acts on other people's mind by showing them as directly as possible what he actually believes. (para. 6)

If this sounds very familiar to us today, it is not because we are familiar with such truth-speaking, but precisely because we are *not*—at least not in the public domain (mainly the mainstream media), in the vast majority of cases. On the contrary, today one is mostly witness

to the deliberate distortion of truth, and not even through the sophisticated use of rhetoric. It is usually unadulterated, blatant lying (Olivier, 2021, 2022b).

Foucault is circumspect enough to add that there are two types of *parrhesia*—sometimes the word is used to denote the genuine thing and sometimes it is employed pejoratively, to indicate that someone is just 'chattering', as Foucault calls it. Heidegger (1978) calls this 'idle talk', and regards it as belonging to the 'inauthentic' sphere of 'everydayess'. In both these instances it means that someone says virtually anything that comes to mind, without exercising any discerning judgement about the sense or implications of what they say, or simply because it is the fashionable thing to say. However, according to Foucault, most of the time when the term is encountered in classical Greco-Roman texts, it is in the affirmative sense of truth-speaking. Needless to point out, it is not a practice explicitly familiar to us today, in the specific sense with which it was endowed in antiquity. Nonetheless, it would not be difficult to find counterparts to *parrhesia* in contemporary society, particularly because there is an exigency for it in the present time. Why is that? The answer to this question will become apparent in what follows. In the text cited earlier, Foucault (1999) reminds one that:

> The commitment involved in *parrhesia* is linked to a certain social situation, to a difference of status between the speaker and his audience, to the fact that the *parrhesiastes* says something which is dangerous to himself and thus involves a risk, and so on…
>
> If there is a kind of 'proof' of the sincerity of the *parrhesiastes*, it is his courage. The fact that a speaker says something dangerous—different from what the majority believes—is a strong indication that he is a *parrhesiastes*. (para. 8)

Recall that this already became apparent in the paradigmatic instance of Socrates, discussed earlier. However, one should remember that not every case of speaking the truth can be considered as being *parrhesia*. Foucault (1999) explains:

> Someone is said to use *parrhesia* and merits consideration as a *parrhesiastes* only if there is a risk or danger for him or her in telling the truth. For instance, from the ancient Greek perspective, a grammar teacher may tell the truth to the children that he teaches, and indeed may have no doubt that what he teaches is true. But in spite of this coincidence between belief and truth, he is not a *parrhesiastes*. However, when a philosopher addresses himself to a sovereign, to a tyrant, and tells him that his tyranny is disturbing and unpleasant because

> tyranny is incompatible with justice, then the philosopher speaks the truth, believes he is speaking the truth, and, more than that, also takes a risk (since the tyrant may become angry, may punish him, may exile him, may kill him)…
>
> Parrhesia, then, is linked to courage in the face of danger: it demands the courage to speak the truth in spite of some danger. And in its extreme form, telling the truth takes place in the 'game' of life or death. (para. 14)

The well-known saying, 'to speak truth to power', is obviously related to this, and probably derives from Foucault's (and also Edward Said's) work. Additionally, have we not witnessed exemplary instances of this today, in the face of what is arguably the largest attempt at a (global) *coup d'etat* in the history of humanity! We all owe those brave souls who have risked their reputations, their incomes, and sometimes their lives, by acting as *parrhesiastes* in the face of almost incomprehensible institutional, technological, and media power a huge debt of gratitude for setting an example for the rest of us. There are too many to list here, but among the names that come readily to mind are those of Dr Naomi Wolf (2022), Dr David Martin (2021); Karen Kingston, Whitney Webb, Robert F. Kennedy (2021, 2022), Dr Joseph Mercola (2021 [with Cummins], 2022, 2023, Dr Robert Malone (2022), Dr Peter McCullough, Alex Berenson, Dr Meryl Nass, Dr Denis Rancourt (2023; Malone, 2023) and Todd Callender (Dustin Nemos, 2023).

Among those who have paid with their lives for practicing *parrhesia*, two names stand out to me—those of Dr Andreas Noack, who was murdered a few days after he posted a video online to show how the nanoscale graphene hydroxide 'razor blades' in mRNA pseudo-vaccines destroy one's blood vessels (Dustin Nemos, 2021); and Dr Rashid Buttar (RealWorldNewsChannel.T.ME., 2023), who (coincidentally?) died shortly after an interview with CNN, where he did not pull his *parrhesia* punches as far as ongoing post-'pandemic' iatrocratic murders were concerned, candidly comparing Dr Fauci with Adolf Hitler during the interview. As Foucault said, *parrhesia* is dangerous and risky. However, what choice does one have, if not merely your income, reputation, and your life, but also—more importantly—your moral integrity as a human being is at stake? It takes courage to be a *parrhesiastes*. This is why Foucault (1999) observes that:

> When you accept the *parrhesiastic* game in which your own life is exposed, you are taking up a specific relationship to yourself: you risk death to tell the truth instead of reposing in the security of a life where the truth goes unspoken. Of course, the threat of death comes from the Other, and thereby requires a relationship to himself: he prefers himself as a truth-teller rather than as a living being who is false to himself. (para. 17)

Presumably by now—four years after the present nightmare began, with a supposed 'pandemic', accompanied by a host of oppressive measures, such as lockdowns, etc.—a fair percentage of people know what *evil* power is behind the attempts to cause the collapse of the world economy and decimate the world's human population (Grand Jury, 2022a). I use the word 'evil' advisedly, for there is no way of saying more clearly and accurately what animates the actions of those agents in the service of the Leviathan in question, which has several fronts, among them most prominently the World Economic Forum (WEF) and the World Health Organisation (WHO). Moreover, one cannot expect any *parrhesia* from them. On the contrary, as Foucault points out, 'It is because the *parrhesiastes* must take a risk in speaking the truth that the king or tyrant generally cannot use *parrhesia*; for he risks nothing'.

PARRHESIA AND THE QUESTION OF EVIL TODAY

However, in case anyone should suspect that there is no real evidence for claiming that evil acts have been perpetrated in relation to things associated with, or following in the wake of, the 'pandemic', I shall quote from the transcript of a speech by Dr David Martin (2021)—a notable truth-teller—about the so-called 'vaccines':

> And… let's quote, shall we, from the *New England Journal of Medicine*, and from the *Lancet*. And this is October, and this is December respectively and I'm just going to go ahead and read this quote. 'At the time of this writing, no correlate of protection from sars-cov-2 has been established'…
>
> In other words, not a shred of evidence from the clinical trials, said anything about protection from infection with sars-cov-2, which means every single person who has value signal[ed] their vaccination because they're doing their part, not to be infected with sars-cov-2 and not to get COVID-19 newsflash, you have been violating the Federal Trade Commission Act by deceptive

> practices. You've been telling people that there is a protection that the data itself does not afford.
>
> Hey—but maybe that was just one report. So why don't I read from the second report, and I quote, and this is *Lancet*… 'no existing vaccines have been shown to be effective against infection with any beta coronavirus, the family that includes sars-cov-2, which causes COVID-19'…
>
> This isn't my opinion, this is not me selectively choosing to take a spin on facts, this is in fact, fact, which then begs the question… What would motivate Pfizer and Moderna. And more importantly, felonious Fauci, the unsavory. What would motivate them and CDC [Centers for Disease Control and Prevention] and others, to lie to the American people about this being a vaccine because vaccines in the ordinary course of the use of that term invokes within the listener, a presumption of protection against infection and protection against transmission, neither of which have been established at all. Why would they use the term vaccine... (p. 5)

It is not difficult to perceive in the flow of his address that David Martin is a master rhetorician, building up from the publicly given statements in 'reputable' medical journals, that no 'existing vaccine' affords any protection against COVID-19, to the next stage of his argument:

> As recently as 2018, Moderna was insisting that they were not making vaccinations. They were insisting that this is gene therapy technology and it was cutting edge and it was all this kind of nonsense. And suddenly, courtesy of sars-cov-2, it suddenly became a vaccine company. It wasn't a vaccine company before, it's not a vaccine company now, it's a gene therapy technology company, with an unproven gene therapy. That's what it is…
>
> I think that if Anthony Fauci, if Moderna, if Pfizer and others—public health authorities around the country and around the world—actually called this gene therapy chemotherapy. Number one, people wouldn't want to take it. And they wouldn't want to take it for a good reason, because experimental gene therapy is a bad idea, no matter who it is no matter when it is no matter where it is. Experimental gene therapy should not be relentlessly and recklessly distributed to a population… that shouldn't happen. (Martin, 2021, pp. 5–6)

What does this prove about evil actions, one might ask. It depends, firstly, on whether one would regard it as acceptable for companies to market, and governments to mandate, injections ('jabs') misleadingly labelled 'vaccines'—with all the concomitant expectations

concerning protection against a putatively deadly 'virus'—and secondly, on whether there has been any evidence suggesting that this 'gene therapy' was not neutral in its effects, but harmful, if not lethal.

The answer to the first question is, of course, that it is undeniably unacceptable on moral and ethical grounds. The second question has been answered by several studies, including one that shows more than 17 million people to have died from the COVID-19 shots (Malone, 2023; Redshaw, 2023). Dr Denis Rancourt (undeniably a truth-teller), after discussing the correlation between all-cause mortality and COVID-19 'vaccines' across the world, sums up his findings as follows:

> And so that's the conclusions about vaccines. So from this work, we're able to calculate how many people would've died globally, given that we've studied so many countries now and we find that 17 million people were killed by the vaccines on the planet. That's our number. (Cited in Malone, 2023, para. 40)

While some would argue strenuously that, even if this colossal mortality figure is granted, it is impossible to ascribe evil intent to anyone involved with the manufacture of the COVID-19 'vaccines', such an argument is patently disingenuous, and reeks of what has become known as 'gaslighting'—treating others as if they are stupid. One look at evidence-based information on the inadequacy of supposed 'clinical trials' of the COVID-19 'vaccines' (Kennedy, 2021) is sufficient to reject any suggestion, that the number of global deaths from the COVID-19 jabs was coincidental, and could not have been foreseen. In the absence of a convincing argument to that effect, it is difficult *not* to impute evil intent to those who manufactured and promoted these 'gene therapy' products, such as Albert Bourla (of Pfizer), Anthony Fauci, and Bill Gates (Kennedy, 2021, 2022; Olivier, 2023b). Referring to the advent of the COVID-19 'pandemic' and everything that has accompanied it, Naomi Wolf (2022; referred to earlier) does not hesitate to call evil by its name: 'This massive edifice of evil, was too complex and really, too elegant, to assign to just human awfulness and human inventiveness. It suggested a spiritual dimension of evil' (p. 253). This is truth-telling in the face of the tyrants who have engineered it.

PARRHESIA AS PSYCHOTHERAPY

What can one infer about the psychotherapeutic implications of *parrhesia*—truth-speaking—from the earlier discussion of Foucault's characterisation of this important practice—not only among the ancient Greeks, but arguably today as well; perhaps, given the demonstrable mendacity, pervasively encountered in the mainstream media of today (Olivier, 2022b, 2023c), *especially* in the present time?

The first California lecture (by Foucault) on *parrhesia*, referred to above, has already furnished one with important clues as to the therapeutic nature of this ancient practice. Recall that there Foucault says: 'in *parrhesia*, the *parrhesiastes* acts on other people's mind by showing them as directly as possible what he actually believes' (n.d., para. 6). Put differently, when a person acts as *parrhesiastes*, he or she discards (as Foucault reminds one) all rhetorical devices that may be aimed at persuading an audience to believe something, which devices therefore presuppose some degree of disingenuity. In contrast with this, in terms of personal convictions the *parrhesiastes* stands 'naked' as it were, before their audience, baring their soul or psyche to the *fullest extent possible* for a human being gifted with language. I mention this because, psychoanalytically speaking, it is per definition impossible for anyone to gain direct access to their own unconscious, repressed beliefs, fears, and anxieties; one is here strictly referring to what one is capable of in the form of what might be termed *radical sincerity* and honesty about oneself. (The ancient Greeks lacked the vocabulary of psychoanalysis, however, even if tragedians such as Sophocles arguably grasped the concept of the unconscious—something that cannot be pursued here.)

What strikes one about this is the invaluable therapeutic value that such sincerity must have for the truth-speaker in question. Whether one is making a clean breast of some previously hidden feelings of guilt for having lied about something, or ill feelings felt towards someone, or dismay about a friend's behaviour towards this very person, or towards oneself, or—in a 'political' context, before an audience—courageously addressing divisive or contentious issues which might provoke the ire of (some of the members of) this assembly, in doing so one is at one with oneself to the greatest extent possible. One might say, in Aristotelian vein, that such a sustained action is unavoidably *cathartic*, despite (or perhaps precisely because of) the fact that, as Foucault (1999) says, 'Someone is said to use *parrhesia*

and merits consideration as a *parrhesiastes* only if there is a risk or danger for him or her in telling the truth' (para. 14). What does this imply?

Catharsis, according to Aristotle, is a kind of 'purging', and the term is in fact often translated as 'purgation' (*catharsis* means 'cleansing' in ancient Greek), as shown where, in Part 6 of Aristotle's *Poetics*, he describes tragedy as follows:

> Tragedy, then, is an imitation of an action that is serious, complete, and of a certain magnitude; in language embellished with each kind of artistic ornament, the several kinds being found in separate parts of the play; in the form of action, not of narrative; through pity and fear effecting the proper purgation of these emotions. (n.d., p. 3315)

In the case of someone engaged in truth-speaking, which Foucault stresses entails courage on the part of the speaker (where asymmetrical power-relations, and hence risk and danger are involved), it does not seem that fear should *necessarily* accompany the act of speaking, although—the *parrhesiastes* being human—it probably does to some degree. One is reminded of the saying that 'only someone capable of fear is capable of courage'. Courage only makes sense where there is fear; could a person incapable of fear be called courageous? It seems to me that a creature sufficiently insensible to lack fear completely could probably not appropriately be said to have courage. Hence, it appears reasonable to claim that the same *catharsis* or 'purgation' of (pity and) fear that the audience experiences in the face of an unfolding tragedy, must be experienced by the truth-teller when risking their reputation, their livelihood, and possibly even their life. On the basis of having had the salutary 'cleansing' experience of witnessing a tragedy being enacted on a stage, I would argue that, analogous to that, *parrhesia* would be (in fact, *is*) therapeutic.

Another reason for claiming this, concerns what one might term the ex-centric structure of truth-speaking. When one decides to speak the undisguised truth, and acts accordingly, it presupposes a relationship of the self to the self (as Foucault argues, above)—in other words, a certain ex-centricity, grounded in the constitutively human capacity of reflexivity, or the ability to examine certain aspects of oneself 'reflexively' and critically. The truth-speaker therefore deliberately places herself or himself in the position of acting in a manner commensurate with the 'truth of the self', disclosed to the other, or others. This experience is therapeutic in so far as it 'brings the self back to itself' *as it is*, in this manner reducing

possible alienation from the self, in other words self-deception, optimally. This is why Foucault writes that the *parrhesiastes* (1999, quoted above): 'requires a relationship to himself: he prefers himself as a truth-teller rather than as a living being who is false to himself' (para. 17). Clearly, this has exceptional *ethical* value, given the experience of the truth-speaker, that he or she is 'true' to themselves. What could be more therapeutic than this?

In the *fourth* lecture on *parrhesia* given by Foucault in California in 1983 (Foucault, n.d.), he elaborates on what he terms 'Socratic *parrhesia*', which—in addition to what one may already have gathered in this regard from his *first* lecture, discussed earlier—provides further clues as to the possible psychotherapeutic value of *parrhesia*. In his discussion of Plato's dialogue, the *Laches*, Foucault distinguishes between the *parrhesia* practised in front of the Athenian Assembly and what he terms the 'Socratic parrhesiastic game', where the philosopher's interlocutor is 'tested'. While the former does not involve a face-to-face relationship with the *parrhesiastes* who is addressing the *demos* in the Assembly, the latter consists in precisely such a face-to-face encounter. In addition, Foucault points out, in this personal meeting, Socrates' interlocutor is directed by the philosopher's discourse, in the specific sense of not simply passively listening to him—as the audience in the Assembly listens to the *parrhesiastes* addressing them—but being 'tested', in the sense that he (in modern society it could also be a 'she') is led to 'giving an account' of himself (or herself). Foucault cautions against understanding this in terms of Christian (and no doubt psychological or psychiatric) conceptions of autobiographical information or a 'confession' of sorts, however. He goes on to observe:

> In Plato's or Xenophon's portrayals of him, we never see Socrates requiring an examination of conscience or a confession of sins. Here, giving an account of your life, your *bios*, is also not to give a narrative of the historical events that have taken place in your life, but rather to demonstrate whether you are able to show that there is a relation between the rational discourse, the *logos*, you are able to use, and the way that you live. Socrates is inquiring into the way that *logos* gives form to a person's style of life; for he is interested in discovering whether there is a harmonic relation between the two. Later on in this same dialogue… for example, when Socrates asks Laches to give the reason for his courage, he does not want a narrative of Laches' exploits in the Peloponnesian War, but for Laches to attempt to disclose

> the *logos* which gives rational, intelligible form to his courage. Socrates' role, then, is to ask for a rational accounting of a person's life. (n.d., para. 13)

A careful reading of this passage brings to light a similar structure to what was discovered earlier regarding truth-speaking as a reflexive way of bringing the self in accord with what one could characterise as the 'truth of the self', in so far as one conveys this to a friend or an audience. Here, too, Foucault discerns in Socrates' requirement of his interlocutor, that the latter *reflexively* reveal the *logos* (or reason) that imparts comprehensible form to his life. In other words, the Socratic 'test' is his interlocutor's demonstration—similar to that which emerged in the earlier interpretation of *parrhesia* (above)—of *reflexive* accounting aimed at yielding a kind of 'accord' between a way of living and the rational account of this. Again, one witnesses here different aspects of the self, brought into a specific configuration with each other, which might perhaps be described as 'congruence of character'. Attaining a rational assessment of a mode of existence which amounts to affirming the relationship between these two activities—rational estimation and manner of living—as one of 'congruence', would be equally therapeutic for the one 'tested' in this way by his or her philosophical interlocutor (in this case Socrates). It would be therapeutic because such a person would experience himself or herself to be 'at one' with themselves—with all the ethical implications this has—where 'at one' refers to the different aspects of a self that are shown to be commensurate with each other.

I used the term 'accord', above, advisedly, to resonate with Foucault's employment of the term 'harmonic' (relation) in the previous quotation. When one reads Laches' reply to Nicias in the eponymous dialogue, it becomes clear what spurred the French philosopher to use this musical term. Talking about 'discussions', Laches says:

> I take the speaker and his speech together, and observe how they sort and harmonize with each other. Such a man is exactly what I understand by 'musical', he has tuned himself with the fairest harmony, not that of a lyre or other entertaining instrument, but has made a true concord of his own life between his words and his deeds... Such a man makes me rejoice with his utterance, and anyone would judge me then a lover of discussion, so eagerly do I take in what he says… (Cited in Foucault, n.d., para. 17)

What Laches says next, in order to contrast his experience of a speaker who is 'musical' in the specified sense with its opposite, is a striking characterisation of a person who lacks 'congruence of character' as described earlier:

> But a man who shows the opposite character gives me pain, and the better he seems to speak, the more I am pained, with the result, in this case, that I am judged a hater of discussion. (Cited in Foucault, n.d., para. 17)

To be clear, it is the *lack* of congruence between what a person says and how he or she lives, that is unbearably painful to Laches. In ordinary language one might say such a person is a hypocrite, unlike Socrates, of whom Laches states that, 'I found him living up to any fine words however freely spoken' (quoted in Foucault, n.d., para. 17). Socrates is, in other words, an exemplar of 'character congruence', and it follows that someone who, through 'Socratic *parrhesia*', passes the test of such congruence between their way of life and their self-reflexive account of that life, has had a therapeutic experience in the course of playing the Socratic *parrhesiastic* game. Socrates' role in this game is said to be that of a 'basanos' (in ancient Greek), or 'touchstone'. As Foucault (n.d.) puts it: 'Socrates' "basanic" role enables him to determine the true nature of the relation between the *logos* and *bios* of those who come into contact with him' (para. 14). Clearly, for those who pass the 'basanic' test, it is a therapeutic experience.

What would a concrete instance be, in the fraught present we inhabit, of such *parrhesia*, taking into account all the facets of this ancient—but ineluctably also contemporary—practice? Speaking personally, because that involves direct (albeit linguistically mediated) experience, I can think of no more demonstrably 'better'—that is, exemplary—instance than a recent experience when addressing a relatively small group of fellow philosophers at a conference, with the highly relevant fact, that most of those present were also on friendly terms. This was the case because it was a meeting of a group of philosophers from three different countries who regularly meet for an 'intimate' conference in one of these countries on a rotating basis. This is of optimal value for practicing *parrhesia*: one is in the presence of friends (in varying degrees); one speaks the unvarnished and sometimes unpleasant-to-hear truth as you experience it, as directly as possible, knowing that one is 'testing' one's friendship in doing this, if not risking something more serious, such as public denouncement.

The topic of my very informal, direct, frequently-making-eye-contact-with-different-individuals talk—not a paper read formally—was 'How (most) philosophers have failed humanity' (based on a paper I had published earlier; Olivier, 2023c), with the clear implication that this included (at least some of) them. My focus was the COVID-19 'pandemic' (as well as other, related, issues), and having reconstructed this lamentable episode (arguably of a continuing series) in human history, I proceeded to relate relevant examples of prominent philosophers who, despite their presumed 'vocation' of speaking (and writing) the truth, have ignored demonstrable evidence of deception, disinformation, misinformation, disingenuousness, and most seriously, arguable malevolence, and instead, through their inaction, tacitly supported the agencies (demonstrably) guilty of such malfeasance and outright crimes against humanity. This I contrasted with countervailing instances of philosophers and other intellectuals and professionals who have done the (laudable) opposite, namely, to bring forward the terrible truth that mainstream media have hidden from the public, concerning what could only be described as a programme of democide (Malone, 2023).

Needless to stress, while I spoke, there were unmistakable, intermittent signs of discomfort among members of the audience—despite not showing anger or adopting an accusatory attitude on my part, but at the same time with as much firmness as I could muster. What I was trying to do, was to 'test' them in the manner of a Socratic *parrhesiastes*, because being a relatively small audience, seated not in front of me in rows of seats, but around me, allowed me to look them in the eye while I spoke. It was a matter of confronting friends and colleagues with an evidently unpleasant truth (as I already knew from having talked to some of them privately on the matter), and knowingly risking our friendly and collegial relations.

What was the outcome of my risky venture? When I had finished talking, and time for discussion arrived, I was expecting to be 'attacked', or at least vehemently criticised, by some members of my audience. That did not happen. Initially there was a protracted, mostly uncomfortable, silence. Then one person spoke up. He was a prominent philosopher from a university in our country, and he 'confessed' that, in the terms I had used, he 'supposed' that he was also guilty of having 'failed humanity', although—he added in exculpatory fashion—he had in fact written to a local newspaper to protest the infringement of our human rights

by the brutal lockdown measures that had been imposed in our country. This enabled me, in responding to his own *parrhesiastic* speech, to point out, quite truthfully, that in *that* case he had, in fact, acted publicly on behalf of, not just himself, but all of humanity. This seemed to reassure him, although he did not say anything further.

This colleague was the only one to speak during the discussion session, which initially surprised me, but on reflection it made sense: it must have been a difficult experience to be told that one had failed humanity as a philosopher, and in relation to a matter of life and death to boot! Several members of my audience—friends of mine—subsequently spoke to me at the coffee shop in the conference venue, and from their responses to my talk it seemed to me that, by and large, my risky *parrhesiastic* venture had 'paid off'. They were critical of some of what I had said, but not resentful. Instead, they thanked me for drawing their attention to what they had (knowingly or tacitly) ignored, and when we parted we were still friends. Some of them have remained in contact with me on the issue, which has been continuing to unfold (Olivier, 2024).

In sum, this seems to indicate, but without any guarantee, that a *parrhessiastes* who speaks the truth to an audience that comprises *a group of friends and colleagues*, may cautiously hope to 'get through' to at least some of them. After all, not everyone spoke to me after our meeting, so I have no way of knowing what the rest of them felt about my truth-speaking. Perhaps the impression of relative 'success', is due to the kind of audience it was, but judging from written responses to some of my *parrhessiastic* practice in online public spaces (frequented by thousands, if not millions of people), at least in some instances, one does seem to touch a nerve (Olivier, 2024).

CONCLUSION

What can one learn from Foucault's explication of truth-speaking (*parrhesia*)? That today, given the darkening of the world that was touched on earlier—and of which more and more manifestations are appearing on a virtually daily basis—it is nothing less than a requirement, if not an imperative, for everyone who is aware of this imminent threat to our freedom as well as spiritual, psychical, and physical integrity, *to be a truth-teller*, simply because so much

depends on it. If at times one feels hopeless in the face of all the power—institutional, juridical, military, technological—wielded by the group of technocratic neo-fascists driving the attempted global *coup d'etat*, recall American President Franklin D. Roosevelt's inspiring words, uttered in his inaugural address in 1933: 'that the only thing we have to fear is fear itself'. As he proceeded to remind his audience, fear 'paralyzes needed efforts to convert retreat into advance'. This is no easy task, but if I may turn to another inspiring source of courage, which—writing from experience—is far more psychologically effective than might seem at first glance, here are the lyrics of 'Whistle a Happy Tune' (by Rodgers and Hammerstein, 1951, from the musical, *The King and I*; sung by Deborah Kerr, in the film version, directed by Walter Lang in 1956):

> Whenever I feel afraid, I hold my head erect
>
> And whistle a happy tune so no one will suspect I'm afraid.
>
> While shivering in my shoes, I strike a careless pose
>
> And whistle a happy tune and no one ever knows I'm afraid.
>
> The result of this deception is very strange to tell,
>
> For when I fool the people I fear, I fool myself as well!
>
> I whistle a happy tune, and ev'ry single time
>
> The happiness in the tune convinces me that I'm not afraid.
>
> Make believe you're brave and the trick will take you far;
>
> You may be as brave as you make believe you are.
>
> You may be as brave as you make believe you are!

For the full encouraging effect of this stirring song, it may be a good idea to listen to it—it should be easy to find online. If this does not move one to start practising *parrhesia* in these 'fragile times', I would recommend looking for a Socratic figure who would.

REFERENCES

Aristotle. (n.d.). Poetics (H. Butcher, Trans.). In W. D. Ross (Ed.), *Aristotle—Works*. Holy Books. https://www.holybooks.com/wp-content/uploads/The-Complete-Aristotle.pdf

Baumer, F. L. (1977). *Modern European thought: Continuity and change in ideas, 1600–1950*. Macmillan.

Dustin Nemos. (2021, December 1). *Dr Noack killed 4 days after posting this vid on how graphene hydroxide nano-razors destroy body* [Video]. Bitchute. https://www.bitchute.com/video/NDED1fZQFHI4/

Dustin Nemos. (2023, September 23). 5G Activated Zombie Apocalypse [Video]. Bitchute. https://www.bitchute.com/video/zS3qD2RSzXMG/

Foucault, M. (n.d.). *Practice of parrhesia: Discourse & truth, problematization of parrhesia—Six lectures given by Michel Foucault at the University of California at Berkeley, Oct–Nov. 1983* [Lecture 4]. https://foucault.info/parrhesia/foucault.DT4.praticeParrhesia.en/

Foucault, M. (1999). Parrhesia: The meaning and evolution of the word parrhesia in discourse & truth: The problematization of parrhesia. https://foucault.info/parrhesia/foucault.DT1.wordParrhesia.en/

Foucault, M. (2007). *The politics of truth* (L. Hochroth & C. Porter, Trans.). Semiotext(e).

Grand Jury. (2022a, February 6). *Grand Jury | Day 1 (English)* [Video]. Odysee. https://odysee.com/@GrandJury:f/Grand-Jury-1-EN:0

Grand Jury. (2022b, February 21). *Grand Jury Day 5 | English* [Video]. Odysee. https://odysee.com/@GrandJury:f/Grand-Jury-Day-5-online_1:4

Heidegger, M. (1978). *Being and time* (J. Macquarrie & E. Robinson, Trans.). Basil Blackwell.

Kant, I. (2016). An answer to the question: What is enlightenment? (L. W. Beck, Trans.). In *The collected works of Immanuel Kant*. Delphi Classics.

Kennedy, R. F. (Jr). (2021). *The real Anthony Fauci: Bill Gates, big pharma, and the global war on democracy and public health.* Skyhorse Publishing.

Kennedy, R. F. (Jr). (2022). *A letter to liberals. Censorship and COVID: An attack on science and American ideals*. Children's Health Defense.

Malone, R. W. (2022). *Lies my gov't told me: And the better future coming*. Children's Health Defense, Skyhorse Publishing.

Malone, R. W. (2023, November 27). *Not 14M lives saved, but over 17M dead*. Brownstone Institute. https://brownstone.org/articles/not-14m-lives-saved-but-over-17m-dead/

Martin, D. (2021, January 11). *Butterfly of the week*. https://www.davidmartin.world/wp-content/uploads/2021/01/BotW_transcript_01112021.pdf

Mercola, J. (2022, April 18). *The COVID shots are killing people?* The Epoch Times. https://www.theepochtimes.com/the-covid-shots-are-killing-people_4411307.html

Mercola, J. (2023, November 17). *The end of privacy is near*. https://articles.mercola.com/sites/articles/archive/2023/11/17/citizenfour-the-end-of-privacy-is-near.aspx

Mercola, J. & Cummins, R. (2021). *The truth about COVID-19: Exposing the great reset, lockdowns, vaccine passports, and the new normal*. Chelsea Green Publishing, White River Junction.

Olivier, B. (2015). Battlestar Galactica, technological development and eternal recurrence. *Film and Philosophy (US Journal of the Society for the Philosophic Study of the Contemporary Visual Arts)*, *19*, 127–140. https://doi.org/10.5840/filmphil2015199

Olivier, B. (2021). The 'pandemic' and the *differend*. *Phronimon—Journal of the South African Society for Greek Philosophy and the Humanities*, *22*, 1–35. https://doi.org/10.25159/2413-3086/9764

Olivier, B. (2022a). Beyond Agamben's 'Homo Sacer'—The 'pandemic' as final reduction of humanity to 'bare life'. Part 1. *Psychotherapy and Politics International*, *20*(3), 1–23. https://doi.org/10.24135/ppi.v20i3.08

Olivier, B. (2022b). Massive deception masquerading as information and communication: A (largely) Derridean perspective. *Phronimon—Journal of the South African Society for Greek Philosophy and the Humanities*, *23*, pp. 1–31. https://doi.org/10.25159/2413-3086/10811

Olivier, B. (2022c). Therapeutic reflections on the 'pandemic'. *Psychotherapy and Politics International*, *20*(1&2), 1–29. https://doi.org/10.24135/ppi.v20i1and2.08

Olivier, B. (2023a). Beyond Agamben's 'Homo Sacer'—The 'pandemic' as final reduction of humanity to 'bare life. Part 2. *Psychotherapy and Politics International*, *21*(1&2), 1–22. https://doi.org/10.24135/ppi.v21i1and2.03

Olivier, B. (2023b). *Exposing the drive to enslave humanity—Philosophical interventions. A closer look at the sustained attempt to install a global, AI-controlled totalitarian regime*. Lambert Publishing.

Olivier, B. (2023c). How (most) philosophers have failed humanity. *Phronimon—Journal of the South African Society for Greek Philosophy and the Humanities*, *24*, 1–25. https://doi.org/10.25159/2413-3086/13440

Olivier, B. (2024, May 10). *Open letter to the people: The time is now*. Brownstone Institute. https://brownstone.org/articles/open-letter-to-the-people-the-time-is-now/ (Republished on Frontnieuws, 2024, May 12, https://www.frontnieuws.com/open-brief-aan-het-volk-de-tijd-is-nu/)

Plato. (1997). Apology. In *Plato—Complete Works* (G. M. A. Grube, Trans., & J. M. Cooper, Ed.). Hackett Publishing Company.

Rancourt, D. (2023, August 30). *Denis Rancourt on Covid vaccine deaths* [Podcast]. Jerm Warfare. Retrieved October 7, 2023, from https://jermwarfare.com/conversations/denis-rancourt-vaccines

RealWorldNewsChannel.T.ME. (2023, May 20). *Breaking: Dr Rashid Buttar has died suddenly* [Video]. Bitchute. https://www.bitchute.com/video/SStZjAHfOmoo/

Redshaw, M. (2023, October 24). *Researchers find COVID vaccines linked to increased mortality*. The Epoch Times. https://www.theepochtimes.com/health/covid-vaccines-causally-linked-to-increased-mortality-resulting-in-17-million-deaths-scientific-report-5499001

Rodgers, R., & Hammerstein, O. (1951). *I whistle a happy tune* [Song]. From *The King and I* [Musical].

Webb, D. R. (2023). *The great taking*. https://thegreattaking.com

Wolf, N. (2022). *The bodies of others. The new authoritarians, COVID-19 and the war against the human*. All Seasons Press.

AUTHOR BIOGRAPHY

Bert Olivier's principal position is that of honorary professor of philosophy at the University of the Free State, South Africa. He has published academic articles and books across a wide variety of disciplines, including philosophy, art theory, architecture, literature, psychoanalytic theory, cinema, communication studies, and social theory. Bert received the South African Stals Prize for Philosophy in 2004, and a Distinguished Professorship from Nelson Mandela Metropolitan University in 2012. He is also a National Research Foundation (NRF)-rated researcher, and has written extensively in popular media on philosophical, cultural, and sociopolitical issues.

Psychotherapy and Politics International

2024, VOL. 22, NO. 1, 1–9
https://doi.org/10.24135/ppi.v22i1.07

Online ISSN: 1556-9195 Journal homepage: https://ojs.aut.ac.nz/psychotherapy-politics-international

NOTE FROM THE FRONT LINE

An introduction to mutual support groups based on the work of Alan Robinson

Luis Gerardo Arroyo Lynn * Coordinator, Mad in Mexico; master's student at Universidad Autónoma Metropolitana, Xochimilco, Mexico

ABSTRACT

This text is based on a reading of Alan Robinson's work, from which the aim is to question the institution of 'saneism' and the logic behind psychiatric discourses. It is from this perspective that we turn to the possibility of posing and thinking about mutual support groups as a way to confront the over-individualisation of mental health perspectives, aiming at collective alternatives that escape from the predominant neoliberal logic. Part of the intention of this text is not only to make a brief tour of the background and tools that mutual support groups have, but also to think about the possibilities of their application within the field of mental health.

KEYWORDS: mutual support; mental health; activism; saneism; lived experience

'Life is a delicate encounter between madness and sanity, between the abnormal and the normal. The balance consists in knowing how to go from one extreme to the other' (Alan Robinson in *Jorgino*, 2023, p. 48).

Throughout his work Alan Robinson addresses the notion of madness in two possibilities, being and to be mad (Robinson, 2014). While to be mad implies periods or episodes, which varies in terms of the way it presents itself, of its intensity and frequency, it's something momentary from which the subject can get out. Being mad implies a constitutive form of the person; it is a way of being in the world, of perceiving and communicating.

Alan works the notion of madness and mental health from social and cultural aspects, seeking to move away from medical paradigms. For him, madness is a way of relating with

*Contact details: larroyo@madinmexico.org

himself and with others, and which does not represent in itself a positive or negative quality, but something that simply is. Of those characteristics that from other frameworks are considered to be part of the field of psychopathology, such as hearing voices or visions (as he refers to hallucinations), Alan places them in the theatrical field, as a performance of the subject, a language, a way of communicating. It is the social barriers (such as stigmas and prejudices around mental health and madness) that can impede the possibility of communication between the subject and others.

So, for Robinson, madness is an attempt at language invention; 'it is a problem between two different languages, that of sanity and that of madness' (Robinson, 2019).

'Inventing language is an exercise used in theater classes when the intention is to approach impulse, communication and expressiveness outside the mandates of intellect, psychology and rationality' (Robinson, 2023, p. 12). Here, Alan raises a similarity between this quality of creation that allows madness and the tools that theatre makes possible. It is through this approach that Alan questions what socially has been constructed as madness, and it is through the work with theatre that Alan seeks to make an approach, if not of treatment, then of accompaniment of the processes and experiences of madness. Starting from the notion that 'mental health is a social and collective problem' (Robinson, 2014, p. 64), it is understood that the alternative cannot be individualised, but must be accompanied by group processes that allow the person to build their own tools and enunciate their own language.

It is at this point that Alan gives us an outline of his experience in working with theatre groups and his encounter with mental health, and it is in this device that can be located what is known as a *mutual support group*.

In Alan's words,

> [the] mutual support is that it allows the people who participate to hear other ways of telling their stories. The ways in which my supporters told their experiences were transforming my own way of thinking about my own experiences in relation to suffering, delusions, hallucinations and crises. (Robinson, 2022, para. 5)

He continues:

> There's something that sustains me and allows me to maintain a certain constancy in my participation. Mutual support is a way of relating that does not set out to 'help' but simply consists of giving and receiving support according to each person's possibilities. (Robinson, 2022, para. 7)

With these two ideas, the general possibilities offered by a perspective from mutual support groups can be presented: an approach based on the experiences of the people who form it, the questioning of an individualistic approach to mental health, and the change of

position between being a recipient of services and being a participant and manager of one's own alternatives.

Now I introduce some notions about mutual support groups, their background, characteristics, and their benefits in order to have a clearer picture of the proposal based on the reading of Alan Robinson's work.

NOTES ON MUTUAL SUPPORT GROUPS

Faced with individualisation, the collective approach: Introduction

Although there is a recognition of mental health as a cause not only of biomedical factors but also of social components, the alternatives, treatments, and proposals are mostly based on the individual. Dresda Méndez de la Brena (Arroyo Lynn, 2024) uses the idea of Estados Mórbidos (Morbid States) to express the relation between the alternatives that focus on the individual as responsible while ignoring the part of the social and political context: 'part of the *chronification* and that is to play with the affective part of our lives, is to individualize the pain and make us self-responsible for it, because that takes away a tremendous responsibility from the State.' (Arroyo Lynn, 2024, p. 23). (For more about the individualisation of discomfort or '*sickness*', see Arroyo Lynn 2023a,b; Méndez de la Brena, 2022.)

This situation leads users to develop the feeling of being the cause/responsible for their own 'discomfort', a situation that may increase in cases where the condition has triggered an emotional crisis that requires an intervention beyond outpatient treatment, generating breaks with their environment, and leading to situations of exclusion or segregation.

The notion of mutual support arises as part of the collective health movements, as an antagonistic proposal to individualism and the predominant neoliberal logic in the field of mental health. This logic has determined the functionality of people under the terms of performance and productivity, and has seemed to resort to the notions of motivation and overcoming as the resolution of crises and discomfort, which maintains a perspective focused on production/activity as equivalent to wellbeing. (For more references about the relation between neoliberal logic and mental health, see Exposto, 2020, 2023; Frazer-Carroll, 2023; Huertas, 2001; Huertas, 2017.)

At the same time, from the logic of mutual support, not only the socialisation of the experience and the re-appropriation of enunciation from the experience is expected, but it is an alternative in terms of the proposals of care for oneself and others. The socialisation of care seeks to avoid that the responsibility falls only on one person or support network, or on a single system or institution; rather, it seeks to weave a much broader network where the

different people who are part of it can provide care. The distribution of responsibility for care is therefore an alternative that makes it possible to eliminate excessive burdens, as can occur in the cases of family members of users when, in addition to care, they must be responsible for their own duties and obligations, even leading them to face situations of chronification.

Mutual support then not only has effects on the people who are part of these groups, but its effects could extend even further, even becoming a tool that serves as an accompaniment to the therapeutic processes to which people could turn to; being not an antagonistic resource, but complementary.

Background: Where does the notion of mutual support come from?

It is from the book *Mutual Aid: A Factor of Evolution* by Kropotkin, first published in 1902, that the author begins to trace the importance of this concept. Although, in this text, the author focuses the concept not within the conceptualisation of the group, and it is not even outlined as an aspect of relevance in the subject of mental health, but as an evolutionary factor of societies.

For Kropotkin, mutual support is the possibility of 'creating the very conditions of life in society in which man was enabled to develop his arts, his knowledge and intelligence' (Kropotkin, 1902/2020, p. 325), as well as the 'real foundation of our ethical conceptions' (p. 327). It is then the condition of reciprocity and co-responsibility that are established in the links within a community or some social space; it is a way of facing adversities so that the species can ensure its survival.

It is necessary at this point to emphasise the notion of species, since for Kropotkin mutual support is not a unique quality of the human species, but of different animal groups.

'In our mutual relations each of us experiences its moments of rebellion against the individualistic creed in vogue in our days' (Kropotkin, 1902/2020, p. 255). To think that more than 100 years ago Kropotkin spoke of individualism as a predominant posture, what would he think if he were present today when, in Lipovetsky's (2018) words, we find ourselves in a *neo-Narcissistic* era, in which the exaltation of the individual predominates over the possibility of community building. A time in which achievements and accomplishments are considered as individual responsibility and deeds and not as social advances.

However, Kropotkin states throughout the book that collective collaboration—mutual support—is what allows individuals to sustain and build themselves, but above all to overcome crisis situations; an isolated individual is a doomed individual.

CHARACTERISTICS OF MUTUAL SUPPORT GROUPS

In general, mutual support groups are established by, and with, almost exclusive participation of users or ex-users of mental health services. Within these processes there may be participation of professionals; however, this participation is focused on very specific aspects such as clarifying doubts, technical support, and some dynamics that need to be organised. These interventions are raised on very specific occasions and with the request made by the members of the group.

It is then that the protagonism of mutual support groups falls on the users or former users, and from this proposal (and following the logic outlined by Kropotkin) the group is built from horizontality, where there is no distinction in the roles that people can assume within the group. The differences are blurred according to the preparation or professional career that the person has, but the participation in the process is made from the experience of each person.

Highlighting experience as a condition of participation allows for the breaking of the power and hierarchical relationships that are present in other therapeutic spaces. Even when it is a professional with the greatest possible openness and respect for the processes of each person, a certain barrier is always established between those who hold the title of professional and those placed on the other side as patients or users.

This situation causes the interventions of the professionals to be endowed with the qualities of 'certainty' or 'truth', while those of the users remain fluttering as simple 'experiences' or 'profane knowledge'.

However, it is this horizontal and mutually supportive approach that retakes the experience as a condition of sufficient validity, since it places the person in a place from where they can enunciate their own knowledge regarding what is happening to them. This condition allows for the positioning of the person as an active subject of their own process and recovery.

Regarding the technical organisation of mutual support groups, this will be very variable and will depend on the conditions or needs of those who make up the group. The frequency of meetings may be variable, whether they are held with a scheduled frequency or for a specific issue that needs to be addressed. In terms of spaces, there is also the possibility of variability, as there are experiences that have been created within hospitals, some others outside in private spaces, etc. These are points that will have to be taken into consideration when setting up or participating in these groups, since the locality could define certain issues, such as the space available, costs to be covered, etc.

The dynamics of reciprocity that are established within the group follow the logic of the gift, elaborated by Marcel Mauss (2009), which establishes that the gift follows three obligations: giving, receiving, and giving back. The people who are part of the group do it

not only with the idea of receiving something in return (support, company, experiences) but also to add to the development of the group, to give support, and to help when necessary. It is under this proposal that the dynamics of caring and being cared for is established in the group, '*even when you are very bad you can also take care of yourself*' (Erro, 2021, p. 195).

It is important to clarify that this giving and giving back do not imply an excessive act, nor an act of dependence towards others. However, following Saubidet and Azaretto's (2019) proposal, the gift and its triple obligation 'imply [its] counter-responsibilities in both directions, generating beyond goods, alliances and social bonds of all kinds; sharing being a way of attenuating competition' (Baeza Menz, 2016, as cited in Saubidet and Azaretto, 2019, p. 803). It is this possibility of sharing what is given that allows for the avoidance of the development of hierarchy and power relationships within the group's dynamics.

The possibility of giving is not only in the direction of the other person, but is also established within a logic of self-care, where the exchange is carried out under previously established conditions, considering the availability and possibility of each member. Namely, a person may not always be available or able to provide support (it could be because a crisis prevents them from doing so at that moment), and these limits are established in order to maintain self-care, avoid excessive fatigue of the members, as well as to avoid the development of dependency.

The limits of a mutual support group are initially established by the members themselves, and the people who make up the group may set their own conditions for the group. These limits establish the availability of the participants, the activities in which they wish to be involved, and timetables for participation, etc. The activities of the groups are not limited to the concrete space of the group, but extend to other spaces where support may be required. For example, a person in the group enters a period of crisis and needs accompaniment during the nights. One of the members may propose to cover this care at specific times and schedules, but this care provided by the person may not be used as a condition to demand further care.

APPLICATION AND EFFECTS IN THE MENTAL HEALTH FIELD

The fight against self-stigma and the possibility of socialising the discomfort caused by a mental health condition, not as a disease or as an anomaly or deficiency of the subject, but as a way of being in the world, allows the person to question the barriers and prejudices that have been attributed to him/her. It is to be able to 'shed the label of "mentally ill", stuck in a specific diagnosis that transcends the symptoms (what happens to them) to the subjects (what they are), and regain the legitimacy to name themselves, think of themselves and build discourse' (Keller Garganté, 2022, p. 5).

The effect of self-stigma leads the person not only to a situation of greater discomfort and low self-esteem, but also to the belief that they are the cause of his or her own situation, generating a cycle from which it will be difficult to break free.

However, the scope of this proposal is not limited to the registration of self-identity. Its proposed scope seeks to have effects both for the welfare of the users and for the environment in which it develops. As mentioned at the beginning, mutual support groups seek to respond to the needs not covered by mental health institutions, either due to lack of resources, time, space, etc., and being then an accessible possibility to have access to alternatives to mental health treatment. This makes it possible to move from being passive subjects of mental health policies to the search for a community involved in the management and support of care.

While the alternatives coming from institutions are mostly solutions focused on the individual, drugs, and psychotherapy, mutual support groups aim for the creation of support networks outside institutions that allow the person to resume his or her activities outside mental health services. They also aim for the construction of affective bonds that are not governed by institutional norms and that can act as support in those places and spaces where mental health services and professionals cannot access.

It is necessary to emphasise that the logic that is given in the accompaniment within the mutual support groups goes ‘beyond the management of discomfort, care is a way of generating well-being, enjoyment and a meaningful life’ (Keller Garganté, 2022, p. 14). The logic is then not only to provide care or support during moments of crisis, but to achieve the establishment of an accompaniment network that allows the person who is part of it to resume or maintain their activities. Unlike an approach based on functionality or performance, this accompaniment is not focused on the idea that the person can be productive, but can have access to enjoyment, which implies having access not only to cultural or recreational spaces, but also leisure, all of which are considered as part of the process of recovery and wellbeing of the person.

REFERENCES

Arroyo Lynn, L. (2023a, July 3). *Conversación con Colectivo Chuhcan A.C.* [Conversation with Chuhcan Collective ONG]. Mad in México. https://madinmexico.org/conversacion-con-colectivo-chuhcan-a-c/

Arroyo Lynn, L. (2023b, December 19). *Reimaging crisis support: A conversation with Tina Minkowitz*. Mad in America. https://www.madinamerica.com/2023/12/reimagining-crisis-support-tina-minkowitz/

Arroyo Lynn, L. (2024). *Estados Mórbidos, desgaste corporal de la vida contemporánea: Conversación con Dresda Méndez de la Brena (parte 1)* [Morbid States, body deterioration of contemporary life. Conversation with Dresda Méndez de la Brena (part 1)]. Mad in México. https://madinmexico.org/estados-morbidos-desgaste-corporal-en-la-vida-contemporanea-conversacion-con-dresda-e-mendez-de-la-brena-parte-1/

Erro, J. (2021). *Pájaros en la cabeza: Activismo en salud mental desde España y Chile* [Birds on the head: Mental health activism from Spain and Chile]. Virus Editorial.

Exposto, E. (2020). *Máquinas psíquicas, Crisis, Fascismos y Revueltas* [Psiquic machines, crisis, fascisms and revolts]. El Diván Negro.

Exposto, E. (2023). *Comunismo de la salud* [Health communism]. Mad in México. https://madinmexico.org/comunismo-de-la-salud/

Frazer-Carroll, M. (2023). *Mad world: The politics of mental health*. Pluto Press.

Huertas, R. (2001). *Neoliberalismo y políticas de salud* [Neoliberalism and health policies]. El Viejo Topo.

Huertas, R. (Ed.). (2017). *Políticas de salud mental, y cambio social en América Latina* [Mental health policies and social change in Latin America]. Catarata.

Keller Garganté, C. (2022). Apoyo mutuo, autogestión y activismo en salud mental. Elementos para la democratización del cuidado [Mutual support, self-management and activism in mental health: Elements for democratization of care]. *Athenea Digital*, *22*(3), e3130. https://doi.org/10.5565/rev/athenea.3130

Kropotkin, P. (2020). *El apoyo mutuo: Un factor de evolución* [Mutual aid: A factor of evolution]. El Lobo Negro. (Original work published in 1902)

Lipovetsky, G. (2018). *La era del vacío* [The empty era]. Anagrama.

Mauss, M. (2009). *Ensayo sobre el don: Forma y función del intercambio de las sociedades arcaicas* [Essay on the gift: Form and function of exchange in archaic societies]. Katz.

Méndez de la Brena, D. (2022). *Estados mórbidos: Desgaste corporal de la vida cotidiana* [Morbid states: Body deterioration of contemporary life]. Kaótica Libros.

Robinson, A. (2014). *Actuar como loco: Experiencias del teatro y la locura* [Act like crazy: Theater experiences and madness]. Los Hermanos.

Robinson, A. (2019). *El cuerdismo* [Saneism]. Los Hermanos.

Robinson, A. (2022). *Crónica de mi participación en un grupo de apoyo mutuo* [Chronicle of my participation in a mutual support group]. Mad In Mexico. https://madinmexico.org/cronica-de-mi-participacion-en-un-grupo-de-apoyo-mutuo-en-salud-mental/

Robinson, A. (2023). *Jorgino*. Los Hermanos.

Saubidet, A., & Azaretto, C. (2019, November). *Sobre otras formas de intercambio no capitalista (Mauss, Lacan, Lévi-Strauss y Bataille) (potlatch, don y hau)* [Other forms of non-capitalist exchange (Mauss, Lacan, Lévi-Strauss and Bataille) (potlach, gift and hau)]. XI Congreso Internacional de Investigación y Práctica Profesional en Psicología. XXVI Jornadas de Investigación. XV Encuentro de Investigadores en Psicología del MERCOSUR. I Encuentro de Investigación de Terapia Ocupacional. I Encuentro de Musicoterapia. Facultad de Psicología - Universidad de Buenos Aires, Buenos Aires. https://www.aacademica.org/agustina.saubidet/36.pdf

NOTE

The articles and books published originally in Spanish were translated by the author of this article.

AUTHOR BIOGRAPHY

Luis Gerardo Arroyo Lynn, Coordinator for Mad in México, is a psychologist and researcher. He graduated from Universidad La Salle with a degree in Psychology and is currently pursuing a Master's in Social Psychology of Groups and Institutions at UAM Xochimilco. He is currently conducting research on 'Critical Approaches: proposals and dialogue with the Mental Health field'.

Psychotherapy and Politics International

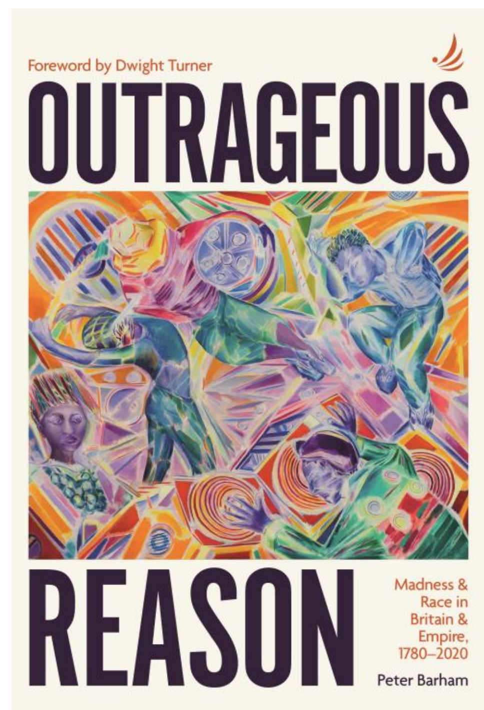
2024, VOL. 22, NO. 1, 1–4
https://doi.org/10.24135/ppi.v22i1.08

Online ISSN: 1556-9195 Journal homepage: https://ojs.aut.ac.nz/psychotherapy-politics-international

BOOK REVIEW

Outrageous Reason: Madness & Race in Britain & Empire, 1780–2020 by Peter Barham (PCCS Books, 2023)

Reviewed by **Kieran Mac Feely***



As a white, middle-class male, training in psychotherapy, I approached Barham's *Outrageous Reason* with trepidation, deconstructing as it does 'white' psychiatry's complicity in the subjugation of primarily black, brown, female, and working-class identities over 300 years of British colonialism. The book bears witness to the concept of 'race' being purposefully constructed, later embroiled with mental health, by a colonial class for both its own self-definition and self-preservation.

Artfully balancing historical and analytical rigour alongside extended conceits; skilfully weaving in first-person, forgotten narratives from history; a potent mix of thesis, imagery, and storytelling emerges to provoke and challenge. Indeed, 20 pages in, I was impelled to re-assess my own complicity, guilt, and vulnerability in equal parts as I discerned just how deeply racial thinking is embedded within the white psyche, and therefore of course, within my own psyche.

Ostensibly, the book connects a chain of colonial atrocities committed against minority groups over 300 years, giving powerful voice to historically silenced 'mental health system survivors' (p. 11). Perhaps more potent still, however, is how skilfully Barham exposes, beneath these events, a persistent 'defensive embattlement' of the white, British, middle-

*Contact details: kieranmacfeely@googlemail.com

class imaginary; an existential need to subjugate any forms of difference, driven by primal fears and 'profound anxieties about the future of the (white) race' (p. 102).

Excavating 'the deep, unconscious structures of British common sense' (Hall, 1999, as cited in Barham, 2023, p. 152), Barham drills down to its foundations: to John Locke and Emmanuel Kant, two founding fathers largely responsible for the liberal democratic system still touted in Britain today. Clearly evidencing their equating of racial difference with 'mental deficiency', and how 'far from being dispensable, the mad person is integral to Locke's system' (p. 18), Barham builds from these foundations with well-reasoned argument, illustrating time and again how the colonial mind not only tolerates and permits 'othering'; but, in fact, depends on this very othering as an essential component to maintain a fragile self-perception of superiority.

Developing his theme, Barham outlines how the abolition of slavery in the early 1900s provoked deep anxieties within the colonial classes, engendering the need for new mechanisms by which to maintain the psychological status quo: enter psychiatry, the 'handmaiden of oppression' (p. 38). Indeed, Barham goes so far as to advocate that European colonisation 'invented psychiatry' to retain 'control of its delusional system' (Hickling, as cited in Barham, 2023, p. 38) following emancipation of its slaves. This theme of a shared fate between 'mad lives and black lives' (p. 1) recurs throughout the book and is difficult to counter, presented as we are with numerous, historical examples ranging from the 1700s through to modern Britain.

A powerful, indeed haunting, conceit running throughout the book concerns that of the 'Zong', a Jamaican slave ship which elicited scandal in 1781 by throwing its human 'sick cargo' of slaves overboard when they were deemed unfit for profit. Aside from drawing light on the atrocity itself, Barham utilises the enduring, metaphorical potency of the Zong (initially named the 'Zorg', meaning 'care', the name was accidentally transformed into 'Zong' due to a careless error), as emblematic of psychiatry's own transformation from care to care-less: the 'decline and degradation (of the Zorg) as a therapeutic institution' (p. 57) serving as an emotive re-enactment of colonial institutions that 'start notionally as a therapeutic environment, or an environment of care' only to be 'transformed into something else' (p. 57). By consistently rekindling this metaphor of the Zong—a relentless echo reverberating throughout his historical analysis—Barham articulately joins the dots, connecting a chain of 'psychiatric colonisation' designed to prevent subjects from any meaningful emancipation: from the Zong affair (1781), to the Kingston Lunatic Asylum (1860), to the Mental Deficiency Act (1913), on up to Jimmy Mubenga's 'Zong-like death' when being deported on a plane by G4S in 2013, to name but a few.

Two potential readerships spring to mind as obvious beneficiaries of Barham's work. Firstly, those akin to myself, perhaps relatively young in their exploration of intersectionality and systemic power dynamics. No doubt already aware of issues such as institutional racism,

this book introduces a 'next step', providing deeper scrutiny of the foundational building blocks upon which 'ideological Whiteness' is built. For me, the idea that racial othering is deliberately constructed as a means of self-definition, rather than by-product, leads to profound re-imaginings of my own responsibilities as a white, middle-class citizen, not to mention therapeutic practitioner. To borrow a much-maligned term, this book will benefit those wanting to get more 'woke'.

For more seasoned scholars, the book also provides a wealth of signposting for further study. Impeccably well-referenced and, at times, almost overwhelmingly quote-laden, Barham provides a myriad of opportunities for deeper dives. Whether it be examinations of a particular historical period; research into the judicial prejudices of modern Britain; or exploration of the foundations of psychiatry (including such curios as learning that psychiatrists were originally known as 'alienists'), there is a veritable wealth of information within these pages. Indeed, Barham himself describes his book as a 'provisional study that requires closer, and more exacting, scrutiny' (p. 200): his invitation is clear.

As a contribution to counselling and psychotherapy, this book invites us, nay impels us, to introspect profoundly on the biases embedded deeply within us; to critically examine our own positions as practitioners. Although focused on psychiatry as opposed to psychotherapy, nevertheless as a trainee within the humanist tradition (currently witnessing, for example, the rights of trans clients being redrawn by our own representative bodies), Barham's conclusions serve as a cautionary warning regarding the fragility of minority rights, even within the world of psychotherapy and counselling.

Similarly, most practitioners are likely aware how their respective modalities were born from the psyches of white men; men not dissimilar in privilege to those described within these pages. As such, Barham's work invites renewed energy in questioning the intrinsic assumptions embedded within our theoretical traditions. It has oft been noted, for example, how predominantly white and middle-class UK psychotherapy training classrooms can be, and this work cautions of the consequences when 'white male psychiatrists do not question their own cultural symptoms which allows them to distance themselves from the phenomenon they construct' (p. 206). An open and non-defensive reading of this book goes some way to reducing that distance, to loosening the bonds of this collectively constructed 'house of cards', acknowledging difficult truths, perhaps even those lying at the heart of our own practice.

REFERENCES

Barham, P. (2023). *Outrageous reason: Madness & race in Britain & empire, 1780–2020*. PCCS Books.

AUTHOR BIOGRAPHY

Kieran Mac Feely is a third-year student of Transactional Analysis at Connexus Institute in Hove. He works for St. Michael's Hospice, normalising conversations around dying, death, and loss within his community. Kieran is also a semi-professional musician, and lives with his partner and three children in Hastings, UK.

Psychotherapy and Politics International

2024, VOL. 22, NO. 1, 1–2
https://doi.org/10.24135/ppi.v22i1.09

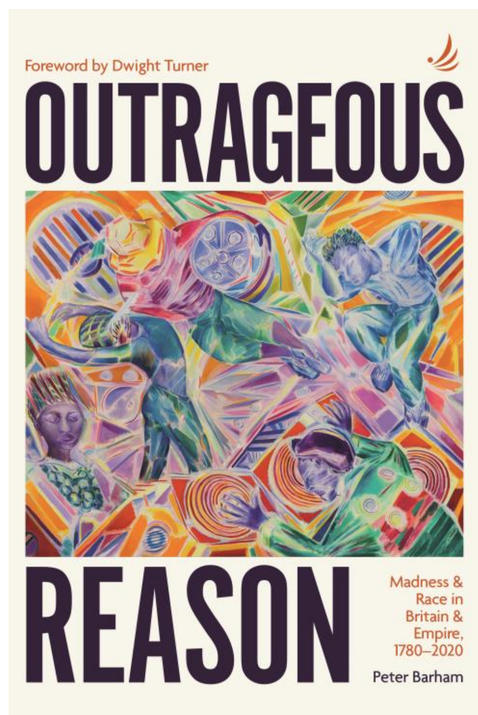
Online ISSN: 1556-9195 Journal homepage: https://ojs.aut.ac.nz/psychotherapy-politics-international

BOOK REVIEW

Outrageous Reason: Madness & Race in Britain & Empire, 1780–2020 by Peter Barham (PCCS Books, 2023)

Reviewed by **Sham Selvaratnam***

I'm writing this within the context of my intersectionality, at a moment when collective trauma, collective healing, and liberation from suffering are at the forefront of many minds and bodies, including mine. Home is London, United Kingdom, and Jaffna, Sri Lanka—geographical and ideological locations which influence the ways I've been socialised and the way I experience power, resistance, and liberation.



For me, *Outrageous Reason* illuminates and complicates the conventional historical and present day discourses in and around mental health, race, madness, reason, and empire. The text draws upon a wide range of archival sources and scholarship to reveal the structural and material violence created through the construction of race and madness. It might also help us to interrogate with fresh eyes, across disciplines, the coloniality which maintains those systems of oppression in our current ideologies and practices, within the UK's statutory sector services—and within us, even as we work on decolonising our minds.

Having worked in a male forensic secure setting, the gap between the present day and past appears slim in ways that are painful to dwell in. One of the most insidious ways of normalising power arrangements I observed in that setting was the 'credibility deficit' that Barham writes

*Contact details: tellsham@gmail.com

of—a construct deeply entrenched in our everyday discourse, along with many other ways deficit models are applied to 'othered bodies' in contrast to those bodies conferred with 'full personhood status'—so much so that to notice and voice the 'credibility deficit' can feel revolutionary—and also puts the namer of such discourses at risk of attracting the same label. 'Credibility and power are co-constitutive' and this is apparent historically and in today's mental health paradigm as Barham names in different ways throughout his text.

The expansive nature of Barham's analysis feels profound. Identifying the normative and unexamined forces of power underlying Western modernity—in particular Whiteness—and its positioning of the racialised 'other' as inferior, justifying all subsequent violence. Barham diligently names and links back to race scholars the ways in which policing (in the everyday sense, as well as the institution of policing), governing, medicalising, detaining, and social order are operationalised through Whiteness, in policies, cultural discourse, and in specific injustices and rights violations carried out behind the 'closed doors' of mental health institutes.

These details provide a bridge between scholarly and lived experience perspectives—and may bring moments of recognition to those less familiar with these ideas.

As a therapist, and activist, I wonder how expressions of individual, collective, and generational resistance, resilience, determination, and courage can make a difference in dismantling the 'ways things are' and moving toward liberation, with allies from across the board, as Dwight Turner outlined in the powerful foreword to this foundational text.

This book will be an essential text for anyone wanting to understand present day mental inequities—policy makers, activists, educators, students, NHS (National Health Service) staff, and anyone working in the field of mental health. It will also be an important reference for those involved in decolonising curriculums and minds—and developing alternative paradigms which confer dignity and humanity onto all bodies.

Psychotherapy and Politics International

2024, VOL. 22, NO. 1, 1–2
https://doi.org/10.24135/ppi.v22i1.10

Online ISSN: 1556-9195 Journal homepage: https://ojs.aut.ac.nz/psychotherapy-politics-international

LETTER

Spotlight on Gaza: February 2024

Fauzia Gaba* M(BACP) Accredited Counsellor/Psychotherapist

I am a female psychotherapist of South Asian origin with many relatives residing in the Middle East.

I owe it to the people of Gaza at the very least to share my thoughts about the unrelenting trauma that has emerged in Palestine since October 7th, 2023. I am, like many colleagues, extremely distressed and disillusioned. The disproportionate response from Israel to defend itself following an attack from Hamas is evident from the existing death toll of innocent civilians, which has now reached a staggering 28,000, and 12,000 of those are children. This currently leaves 1.8 million Palestinians displaced, with many unaccounted for and lying under the rubble. We also cannot ignore the fact that thousands have been illegally detained and have been living in a chronic state of apartheid for over seventy years. It is therefore no surprise to see the outright condemnation of South Africa toward the atrocities being committed in Gaza.

Many of my clients have expressed how our therapy sessions have been a place where they can *safely* explore the depth of both their anger and helplessness because they have been shunned in their workplace. They resort to accessing social media groups where they feel identified with others and can freely raise issues about events in Gaza. Though this can be a positive tool, it also displays the darkest side of human suffering in the most graphic detail. There is the example of the orphan boy who arrived at Al-Shifa hospital in Gaza clutching a bag tightly; devoid of all emotion he explained to the doctor that it contained the body parts of what was left of his parents and other family members. He will be traumatized not for months but years to come like thousands of other Palestinian orphans.

Certain people from the world of news and media feel that the spotlight on the war in Ukraine has diminished. This is not the case; it is simply that in the 21st century we are witnessing an ethnic cleansing of such catastrophic magnitude that the International Court of Criminal

*Contact details: krgaba@aol.com

Justice has condemned Israeli politicians for regarding international law with contempt and is subsequently investigating them for alleged war crimes that equate to a 'textbook case of genocide'. As I write, I hear that troops are continuing their ground offensive with even greater ferocity, blocking urgently needed supplies from United Nations convoys. There are daily acts of violence against Palestinian farmers in the West Bank whose only livelihood comes from growing olives. Palestinians who have recently been referred to as 'animals' by their oppressor, are so hungry they are now resorting to eating animal feed. The United Nations has reported 800,000 cases of serious infection leading to malnutrition.

We saw the immediate response of both the UK and European Union toward the Ukraine war. Their condemnation of Russia was unanimously swift; yet they largely chose to abstain from voting for an immediate cease fire in Gaza. Ukraine's children and families were warmly invited to the UK to be housed and settled. Where is the urgent drive to invite the orphans of Gaza? It is insidious but the unconscious racist element is prevalent. Human beings gravitate toward people who look like them.

I never thought that in my lifetime I would witness a genocide that is being allowed to continue. Powerful, economically robust nations watch on while we may see the possible voluntary expulsion of the remaining population of Northern Gaza. I am often at a loss for words at peace marches when young children ask me why no one puts a stop to the annihilation. It seems that in the 21st century we have made great strides in technology but choose to ignore the lessons of the past.