

LORENA PRETA

Editorial

Let us imagine the journey that Freud and Jung would make today if they had to carry psychoanalysis to some place in the world still untouched by the new discipline. Would be again be a case of “bringing them the plague”, as Freud (perhaps in rather omnipotent, but certainly not ingenuous, fashion) declared to his friend as he crossed the ocean dividing Europe from the United States, where they were going for a conference back in 1909?

In our globalised world it is certainly no longer a question of exporting science or technology, but rather of asking ourselves once again and in ever greater depth about the *universality of the assumptions* that we use to think and organise our view of reality, or their *translatability*. This also means that we must continually place ourselves in a position to pick up the changes and cross-fertilisation that are generated by contacts between different cultures and mentalities. In the dialectical and conflictual play that results, one might think that the players sometimes occupy positions that are almost symmetrical: it is difficult to say who is bringing the plague to whom, if by plague one means an experience that overturns the usual parameters, as a result of contact with otherness and diversity.

Yet one inevitably asks oneself if these imports or transplants of cultures that are so different one from another can escape an imprint that is in some way colonialist. In fact colonial domination, although it is now to a large extent past history, still continues to mark the changing fortunes of many cultures and societies.

At a certain level of discourse therefore, the distinction between dominant and subordinate cultures still remains, as can be seen in today's debate concerning what is termed post-colonialism, which represents a radical questioning of all those categories on which interpretations of cultures in relation to others are based.

Without wishing to privilege this question over the topic examined in the present volume, it is any case convenient to keep in mind the risk run when transporting concepts and practices between cultures.

Exile and the configuration of the mind

The history of psychoanalysis and of its leading figures has been marked by the experience of exile. In 1939, Freud had to shift to London to escape racial persecution, and in the same period many psychoanalysts emigrated from Europe to the United States for the same reason.

In Italy, also as a consequence of the race laws coming into force in 1939, the Italian Psychoanalytical Society was forcibly dissolved. A pioneer and founder of the calibre of Edoardo Weiss was obliged to emigrate to America; the same fate befell Ernst Bernhard, an important figure in Jungian psychoanalysis, who, having already fled to Italy from Berlin, was held for a certain period in a prison camp.

These movements due to historical events have led to the construction of a map of the spread of the discipline that had a quite significant influence on the psychoanalytical theory and techniques. However, rather than seeking to reconstruct the disciplinary and clinical results of this phenomenon of diaspora, it would be interesting to try to understand in what way a condition such as exile was able to influence psychoanalytical thought and influence its atmosphere, providing it with an imaginative and experiential background.

From this point of view, must we think of psychoanalysis as a theory that simply “spread” in the world, at least in the western world, or as a mode of thinking capable, precisely as a result of this condition of exile, of generating concepts of decentering, displacement, heterogeneousness? Did this historical experience correspond to, or in a certain sense superimpose itself upon, the very configuration of the mind? Exile could be seen paradoxically therefore as not only a painful destiny, but as an uprooting that provided an image for the displacement of the Ego itself, never “master in its own house”. In this sense, exile would cease to be a contingent fact relating to an individual’s personal experience, but would coincide with that disturbing inner structure in which the unconscious is the element dominating the scene of consciousness. *Exile could therefore be taken to represent a pattern for reading the structure of the psyche investigated by the discipline of psychoanalysis and as a model for approaching the different cultures with which it engages.*

Operating in the same direction, Giorgio Agamben explores the possibility of redefining the relationship between philosophy and politics by claiming for philosophy a position that is not an ‘exile from politics’ but on the contrary in favour of a new orientation in terms of a ‘politics of exile’. Exile can thus operate as: “...a fundamental philosophical-political paradigm, perhaps the only one which, breaking the thick web of political tradition that is still dominant today, might allow us to think through the politics of the western world from scratch.” “Boldly overturning the status quo, we could then say that the true political essence of the human person no longer consists of mere membership of a given community, but

rather coincides with that disturbing element that Sophocles defined as ‘hupsipolis-apolis’ - above the city and city-less.”¹

Of course, to stress the possibility that the experience of exile might provide critical stimulus and offer an ‘eccentric’ vision of reality should not make us lose sight of the suffering involved. “Exile is terribly interesting to think about, but terrible to experience”, said Edward Said.² We must not “banalize its mutilations”³, and consequently we always have to remember the ‘defensiveness’ that the pain of exile can generate. Indeed, over the course of the years we have witnessed on the one hand an idealisation of exile, and on the other to its covert negation, and there is the conformist view that the exile must adopt the standards and behaviours of the culture and society that receives him or her. Sometimes for the exile a hopeless isolation and alienation prevail, and sometimes the exile seeks out company that exacerbates a sense of nationalistic allegiance to the country of origin, but an exaggerated nationalism that is dogmatic and uncritical. In this condition, the effort involved in affirming, or constructing, one’s identity is dramatically exemplified.

Is it possible to take into account the contradictoriness and difficulty of this fraught experience in order to use exile as a paradigm for working out a ‘strategy’ of contact with otherness?

Psychoanalytical maps

What we have to do is try to understand whether psychoanalysis, as it spreads towards the ‘eastern world’ (to use a very rough definition of the area of interest which this number focuses on), can employ a style based on a perspective that is not anchored in allegiance to and stabilisation of its own codes of reference, using instead the counterpoint generated by the contact between different cultures.

In the past, groups of psychoanalysts, as we have said, were forcibly removed to countries far from their native lands, and there they stayed, founding schools and spreading psychoanalytical thought. Nowadays, some western analysts are shifting to eastern countries to export psychoanalysis; whilst others are leaving the east to complete their training in western countries, then returning to found, in their countries of origin, psychoanalytical schools recognised by the international psychoanalytical community. In this broad picture it is difficult to know the extent to which psychoanalytical training simply obeys standard parameters, and, on the other hand, the extent to which something is being ‘imposed’ by western culture.

As will be seen from the essays and interviews in the present volume, a mutual exchange seems possible, especially in those societies (such as

India) in which the attempt at cultural fusion has occurred ever since the initial stages of psychoanalytical thought.

The general thrust of Livio Boni's argument in her introduction to the dossier on psychoanalysis in India aims to relate the stages of a Freudian passage towards India, in two senses. If at the beginning there was a curiosity on the part of the founder of psychoanalysis for Hindu philosophy and culture, Freud did not hide from himself the fact that "It is never easy to transcend the limits of one's own culture" and that therefore, at the very moment in which the love of knowledge propels one towards otherness, the prejudice rooted in one's own cultural allegiance pushes one far away from any real comprehension of what is new. Boni sums up this set of problems well, also with regard to the other countries examined:

The Freudian moral is still valid: India continues to be a subject, or a field, that is only accessed with difficulty, not only in psychoanalysis, and for very different reasons than those of the age-old indifference of Chinese culture to European thought, or of the conflictual proximity between Islam and its Jewish-Christian antecedents. What seems to make penetration of the "Hindu jungle" a difficult adventure is the paradoxical position that India holds for Europe *from the phantasmatic* point of view: at one and the same time the absolute Origin, and the irreducible Other.

The many essays and interviews in the dossier offer a detailed examination of the different mythologies of western and Indian thought. The text by the first Indian psychoanalyst, Girindrasekhar Bose (unpublished in Italian, the work dates back to 1930) already contains an important attempt to compare the cultures. The contribution by the scholar Charles Malamoud and the interview with the psychoanalyst Sudhir Kakar give a good representation of the problems relating to the importation of psychoanalysis into the Indian context, and the difficulty Freudian culture has in approaching that world.

Paradoxicalness, indifference and conflictuality, thus mark each encounter with the various cultures considered. A common feature emerges however from all the situations examined: the importation of psychoanalytical thought coincides in these countries with the need to find a new language for the individual, distinct from that of the community.

Whether in India or in Arab or Asian countries, a *crisis of subjectivity* seems to have arisen recently, that is in some respects similar to the one we know in the West; but while the loosening here of the meta-social

bonds that ensured connection between the individual and the group to which he or she belongs is producing a sort of dissolution of the subject, in those other cultures there is a juxtaposition between the personal and the collective that is quite virulent.

While in the West we are afflicted by an “unbearable lightness of being”, in Iran the problem is rather a “heaviness of being”, according to the Iranian psychoanalyst Gohar Homayounpour, the female Professor of Psychology interviewed by Barbara Piovano. The community in fact seems to have great power of direct control over the individual, with the imposition of patterns of behaviour and roles from which people struggle to free themselves, choosing perhaps as an alternative those patterns of behaviour that are easiest to assimilate. In any case, these are countries that have undergone enormous transformations over recent years.

The Indian psychoanalyst Jhuma Basak even hypothesises that psychoanalysis in her country might function as the ‘container’ for change. Psychoanalysis is seen by everyone as a form of emancipation which probably does need to reformulate some of its concepts when they come into contact with other cultures, but whose critical function is undeniable. In fact, psychoanalysis is becoming for some the tool for understanding the most worrying phenomena of today.

The analyst of Arab origin, Fethi Benslama, interprets the psychology that forms the basis of Muslim religion in terms of the different role of the father figure of and the repression of the female figure. She also proposes the definition of “mass delirium” for some fringes of Islamic fundamentalism, which express in dramatic form the fundamentalists’ impossibility of feeling themselves represented in the social and cultural changes in the countries to which they belong. Islamism, states Benslama, is a modern construct, a mixture of scientism, nationalism and theology that seeks to “rebuild a myth of identity”. It is along these lines that psychoanalysis can question itself, establishing differences with western tradition and encouraging a debate on both sides of the divide.

From the interview by Daniela Scotto di Fasano with the psychoanalyst of Palestinian origin Gehad Mararweh there again emerges the difficulty in the Islamic world of tackling the internal processes of the individual, who would fear a clash with tradition and the patriarchal structure of society. On the other hand, can the conceptual differences, the differences in the setting, even the different ways in which, as the interview suggests, people arrive at wanting to be a psychoanalyst in countries that are so different, become factors that transform psychoanalysis?

Certainly in some countries that are culturally less contiguous to the West, for instance in China, the risk is simply, as the sinologist and psychoanalyst Rainier Lanselle suggests, that one simply imports patterns

of psychoanalysis for purely utilitarian purposes, as if they were purely techniques, a technical know-how rather than a form of knowledge.

The Japanese psychoanalyst Masahisa Nishizono has a different point of view. He sees psychoanalysis as the theory and technique that is increasingly able to tackle the problems that are posed at global level, encouraging a comparative analysis of eastern and western cultures.

But is a translation between these two cultures truly possible? The sinologist François Jullien suggests it is a question of the capacity to ‘perceive’ the questions posed by the encounter that would force us in this way to redefine our own cultural parameters. Above all it is necessary to define the cultural differences in a new way - in terms of the “gap”, he suggests - to release their creative potential and their possibility of becoming resources for everyone.

Certainly our tools must be very sophisticated and our intention clear and decisive, in order to avoid out falling into a negation of difference or the positing of facile universal categories that obscure reality.

The example cited by the scholar Giacomo Festi is clarificatory in this sense. Investigating the possibility of translation between cultures, he looks at the case of an ethnologist who has chosen as her field of research a Japanese laboratory specialising in genetic research. She examines the protocols, the research methods, the internal communication methods, using a comparable French laboratory as a term of reference, and assessing “the infinite micro-differences between the two laboratories, attributable to a pervasive cultural dimension that nevertheless is undergoing its own transformations and reformulations, increasing at dizzy pace the degree of interpretative complexity.” Yet this is a matter of science, the form of human thought traditionally considered to be based on universal criteria.

Why after all should we be surprised, when faced with the difficulty of mutual comprehension, if even inside a single country one can see examples of induced estrangement, such as to the render a citizen who speaks the same language as another not only a foreigner but even an enemy?

“How much liberty and how many limits does psychoanalysis need today?” is the title of the essay by Annette Simon, a German psychoanalyst who lived and was trained in East Germany, and who for years had to practise psychoanalysis clandestinely, since it was banned. For this very reason she is still today in a better position to measure the complex web that is created with institutional power and which, although it no longer is persecutory - for that ceased after the fall of the Berlin wall and the reunification of the two Germanys - nevertheless tests the spirit of research and freedom from standardisation, especially as regards psychoanalytical theory.

Gábor Szőnyi, interviewed by Cosimo Schinaia, sets aside the old problems due to the lack of freedom in the countries of what used to be called ‘East Europe’, and suggests that the problem for psychoanalysis today is one of ‘integration’, although this does apply exclusively to the societies of eastern Europe, but to Europe as a whole, dominated internally by the French and British models.

In the testimony from Luisa Marino, a young Italian analyst, the problem of the transmission of psychoanalysis becomes emblematic of the Babel of languages that its spread has to cope with, not only in terms of the specific communication problems between different languages, but in the innumerable and substantial differences that, even as countries accept the common criteria laid down by the International Psychoanalytical Association, introduce really different ways of conceiving the training in and transmission of psychoanalysis.

In the interviews and essays contained in the volume, much is talked about the ways to define training, and it is interesting to be able to glimpse, beyond the cluster of different formulas adopted by the various Societies, the common ground that is still the background for psychoanalytical transmission, but which already hints at changes and variations that are surely not irrelevant for psychoanalytical theory. The aspiration is, as ever, to maintain allegiance to the original model but with the even profound modification deriving from different objective circumstances and experiences. How much liberty therefore does psychoanalysis need? It certainly needs liberty at the level of democracy within society, and the freedom to tackle change and to become aware of its own limits.

Lidia Tarantini draws on her experience as an analyst in an Arab country to claim that it is possible to position oneself on a neutral terrain (in the etymological sense of *neuter*, neither one nor the other), a “no-man’s-land” where it is possible to meet the suffering of the other, mending the lost ‘container’ that the suffering has blown apart. Beyond the different way of expressing themselves and the culturally determined ‘contents’ that people approaching an analyst choose to put into the ‘container of their psyches, the analyst’s task is to reintegrate the ‘containing apparatus’ without becoming distracted by unconscious rejections of another person’s culture and without defensively reducing those contents to what is already known. Tarantini evokes the island of Delos, the sacred island where it was prohibited to give birth and to die: “...a no-man’s-land; no-one could say that were born there or had buried their parents there. A land of life, therefore, but also a land of exile, a land of everybody and nobody, given that all the inhabitants of Delos had the legal status of ‘foreigner’.”

To return to the initial point, psychoanalysis can perhaps metaphorically aspire to occupying this space, situating itself both as site of exile and refuge at one and the same time.

In her short story, the Somali writer Kaha Mohamed Aden narrates in an amusing yet thought-provoking manner a foreign woman's clash with western technology. A lift that opens and closes becomes, for the Somali girls who have come to Rome to discover the advanced new world of Europe, a black hole into which a nun, who had come to pick them up, is magically sucked and which then spits her out double, since when the lift opens again she reappears with a second nun. What had happened inside? What diabolical machinations had that space allowed to occur? And how can one interpret any novelty without referring it back to one's usual frames of reference? But also, how can one continue to be open to the impact of experience, not lose that "suspension of disbelief" when faced with what is new, which is so necessary to retain as the basis of the imaginary?

Here then is a varied geography describing a complex and changing territory. If we wish to observe and inhabit it, we cannot, it seems, avoid the problems posed.

Notes

¹ The passages quoted are from a lecture given by Giorgio Agamben in Venice in April 1995, precisely with the title of *Politica dell'esilio* [In English the title means: Politics of exile].

² Edward W. Said, *Nel segno dell'esilio*, Feltrinelli, Milan 2008, p 216. [The original title is *Reflections on Exile*. The page number here and in note 3 refers to the Italian edition.]

³ *Ibid*, p. 217.