

The reason for Geographies of Psychoanalysis

by Lorena Preta

Let me now try to frame this gathering in relation to the research commenced with Geographies of Psychoanalysis.

The relationship between psychoanalysis and culture has to be done through interrogation. Indeed, it opens up a fistful of problems that require numerous different responses. On a general level, it would be fair to say the underlying issue is to understand what it means for psychoanalysis to come into contact with the different cultures in the world and with those experiences of psychoanalysis that are becoming increasingly common in non-Western countries.

This leads to an initial question that is rather theoretical and foundational. Can psychoanalytical hypotheses have a universal value? Can they describe the same - or a similar - psychic dynamic for any human regardless of the historical, social and cultural context?

It also leads to a second question, which is more on the technical side. Can psychoanalysis - perhaps in a revised form compared to its founding assumptions - help with mental suffering in different contexts?

These are two important, but also limiting, questions. I believe that in such a period of major change as the present, where interconnections are increasingly dense, such questions might lead us to confine the issue to within our own precinct, that is, psychoanalysis.

If we move beyond our field, taking with us plenty of our tools, I believe we will increasingly be able to find that *disorientation* that forces us to confront the risk of changing position and that leads us, as sometimes truly happens in psychoanalysis, to a revised description of what we are used to seeing as our identity. The purpose is not to become an other or the Other or even to create a hybrid or a hotchpotch of models, practices, languages and visions of the mind and mankind. Instead, it is to enter a varied field where it is possible not only to benefit from *contamination* (which we well know is implicit in things), but also from *diffraction* and a *deviation in trajectory* that is not unlike what happens when waves meet an obstacle.

In essence, coming into contact with other cultures and anthropological visions is an *impact* and it is important not to face up directly to the obstacle or to go around it to avoid it, but to bend space in other directions, approaching it sideways.

We certainly aren't going to be aided by some form of universal settlement of the differences nor will the absorption of incompatibility help. Likewise - on the other end of the scale - it is no use to force identity, trumpeting and claiming it at all costs. Instead, we should focus on the *gap* (distance) created in meeting the other, a gap that should never be taken for granted or seen as trivial.

Sinologist François Jullien, for example, focuses precisely on the deviation, the way to access knowledge of the world in China. By analysing the *strategy of meaning* in Chinese culture compared to Greek culture, it becomes clear the former is allusive and never direct, avoiding representation and thus the use of metaphor found in Greek culture. Chinese culture is mindful of all changes, even small ones, and the world is defined using categories that have a greater capacity for modular application to different situations rather than some universal meaning.

I have shared this glimpse of critical analysis to give you an example of the usage of a theoretical gap that introduces a different orientation into our perspective of meaning. However, as Jullien says - and this is also well known to psychoanalysis, which remains about subjective, personal meaning - strategies of meaning "can only be understood from within, embracing the individual logic". This path, though, is never straight, but rather full of detours and steps backwards.

It would have been equally effective in getting my point across to mention the rigorous and at the same time disturbing method employed by Silvia Ronchey to approach the meeting of different civilisations, such as the Byzantine one with the Christian one. Along with Islamic culture, this is one of her favourite topics, using thorough historical investigation methods, as well as fiction, as in her book *L'enigma di Piero*.

Thus, it is first about becoming sensitive to differences, developing a watchful *eye* that makes it possible to grasp both differences and shared aspects.

From such a basis, it is necessary to adopt models that allow interaction between texts or content from different cultures. I am not referring solely to the various foundational mythologies and the established cultural aspects, but also to contemporary expressions that are ever changing in every culture and social organisation, seen as living beings that mutually define themselves through contact with others.

This needs to happen not only through comparison, but also propagation (the

diffraction metaphor is useful once more), *creating internal dialectics in individual cultures* that would set in motion - and encourage - a critical self-examination process.

This is the extremely interesting and productive work Giancarlo Bosetti has been doing for years, from the pages of the journal he runs - *Reset* - in the *Dialogues on civilisations* section.

Let me now return more directly to psychoanalysis.

Can this discourse really be applied in some special way to psychoanalysis?

In the leader for the *Geographies of Psychoanalysis* issue of *Psiche* (from which this research stems) I put forward the case that, because of its history, psychoanalysis initially gained ground in the Western world because of the *experience of exile*. However, I also stated that this very clearly follows the *actual configuration of the mind*, reproducing not only the painful fate of certain psychoanalysts (Freud is the best example, of course), but also a condition of disorientation that represents the displacement of the Ego, that is, "never the landlord in his own house".

In this sense, exile would match that disturbing internal organisation whereby unconscious dynamics dominate the conscience. Therefore, it could be *adopted as a way to read the underlying 'disciplines of psychoanalysis and used as a model to approach the different cultures it comes into contact with*.

Let me now turn to a problem that, for psychoanalysts and others, is increasingly common. I am referring to immigration issues. Psychoanalysis can add to the discussion about forms of violent *rejection* and, perhaps more informatively, about the attempt to *enclose the other* in an effort to domesticate it. Such questions are both part of the history of psychoanalysis and its method.

Of course, simply because psychoanalysis is *no stranger to such matters does not mean the discipline is automatically suited to providing the answer*.

Thus, it is important to avoid a sort of *colonisation* by psychoanalysis, in which the discipline imports its method and beliefs into new places and countries as these remain relative, at least in their formulations, to their historical and cultural origins.

These are some of the vertices we can adopt to face the problem of the relationship between psychoanalysis and different cultures.

I'd like now to make a few comments about Gohar Homayoumpour's book, a work that was the motivation for today's gathering. I'd also like to thank her for making the long

journey from Tehran to be here today.

In the afterword I expressed the numerous thoughts the book provoked in me and I'd like to pick up on one that fits in with today.

Gohar is exceptionally generous and courageous in what she details in the book, expressing her past and her emotions through the filter of psychoanalysis.

She does this in the firm belief that her personal and rich clinical experience give her suitable tools to face those transmigrations that occur in the mind and external reality.

Using the elegant, refined method I referred to earlier, she manages to create dialectic between inner parties, the languages she knows and uses, the various other types of languages - psychoanalytical, literary, philosophical - the institutional references, like but not only the IPA, and the internal references. And we are all well aware how important - and bulky - the latter can be.

The backdrop that generates all this movement is her country of origin, Iran, or Persia as Gohar calls it, recalling the ancient fascination of this culture while simultaneously rejecting the exotic flavour suggested by the name.

Gohar left and came back, taking her origins with her and then returning, having incorporated new styles. By occupying that middle position that psychoanalysis allows her to find, she 'amazes herself' each time - poetically, I'd say - she deals with a patient in Iran and she amazes us as we, through her, try to interpret what is unknown, distant and yet also somewhat familiar.

We follow her along this journey through the story of a specific patient who was forged in that country. It is a path of constant movement, between distance and proximity, recognition and difference.

Of course, who could be better than her to tell us about transmigrations, exile and return, different people and countries? We really need to thank her for this journey as it allows us - and drives us - to explore further.