

CRITICAL PSYCHOLOGY

Psy 314 Special Topics in Theory Construction 3 units

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What this course is about.

This is not a traditional course in social psychology. It is an explorational, innovational, and I hope inspirational, investigation of new but relevant, territory. I am not an expert in the territory we will explore. We will be learning together. It might give a hint to know some of the alternative titles I have considered for us: Hermeneutics of Emancipation, Cultural Psychology, Indigenous Psychology, Critical Psychology, PostColonial Theory, and Liberation Psychology. It is interdisciplinary and subversive, that is it confronts the disciplinary approach to education because all disciplines interact with each other despite communities of scholars huddling within disciplines. It is subversive not only toward education, but to the social structures and processes that tend to oppress people. This course could be taught in any department from Anthropology to Zoology. For instance, it involves mass communication, art, literature, linguistics, religion, and so on. Or even better, it could be done without a department. When concepts get really transdisciplinary, one can call them 'philosophy'.

CRITICAL PSYCHOLOGY IN THE PHILIPPINES

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There are many pathological features of Philippine culture that are either caused or exacerbated by the debilitating effects of neocolonial dynamics. These effects include endemic poverty, endemic corruption, diasporic deployment of Filipino labor, trafficking of women and children, exploitation and destruction of indigenous cultures, the paradoxical increase in nationalism coexisting with the desire to leave the Philippines, the consumption of cosmetic bleaching, feelings of failure and learned helplessness, lack of self-fulfillment, feelings of inferiority not

only among the urban, rural, and mountain poor, but also within Christian and Moslem cultures as well,

Postcolonial theory analyzes the nature of these dynamics and explores the ways in which they can be changed. For example, Bhabha (2004), an Indian with an Oxford education, suggests that multicultural experience, especially diasporic, can generate insight into such neocolonial oppression and thus create a coherence to the seeds of discontent and destabilization that enable cultural change. The Katipunan, which may have launched the first successful revolution based on Marxist theory, was inspired in large measure from Rizal's exposure to European universities.

“ . . . it is from those who have suffered the sentence of history—subjugation, domination, diaspora, displacement—that we learn our most enduring lessons for living and thinking.” (Bhabha, 2004, p. 246.)

Fanon, a Martinique expatriate educated in France, as a psychiatrist witnessed psychological trauma in French Algiers. After WWII he participated in the Algerian revolution which won independence in 1962. He applied concepts from psychoanalytic theory to the understanding of colonial culture. He combined psychology and politics, effectively viewing them as an integrated system. He combined psychological concepts with everyday language and experience. His 'psychopolitics' revealed the colonial world as 'pathological and pathogenic', creating conditions of epistemic, cultural, psychical and physical violence.' (Hook, 2005, p. 479.)

“All of Fanon's work falls into that category where the sciences of personality and the sciences of society converge . . . [in an attempt] to traverse the distance between an analysis of the consciousness of the individual and the analysis of social institutions.” (McCulloch, 1983, pp. 206–207)

This, then, is the essence of critical psychology: social processes cannot be understood without involving psychological analysis, and psychological analysis

cannot exist without involvement in changing those social processes. Otherwise psychology is just another social structure supporting the colonial ideologies rather than meeting its commitment to bettering the human condition and liberating oppressed people. To do this, not only must psychology analyze the effects of power on the oppressed, but it must analyze the nature of power and the psychology of the powerful.

“The critical hope here is that by being able to analyze the political in such a psychological way, one might be able to think strategically about how best to intervene within the life of power. Extending this idea, thirdly, one might suggest that we can put certain forms of psychology to actual political work, that we can use both the concepts and understandings of psychology, and the actual terms of psychological experience, as a means of consolidating resistances to power. This, in many ways, is Biko’s (1978) strategy: the conditional use of certain psychological concepts as a basis for solidarity and resistance to power.” (Hook, 2005, pp. 480-481.)

The asymmetrical distribution of wealth and power is now driven in large measure by global capitalism, and is evident in all types of cultures from the smallest barrio to the largest nation, from the poorest to richest nations, from the most totalitarian to the most democratic regimes. The manipulation of the flow of capital, labor, and consumption creates a huge disparity between the forces of exploitation and the forces of emancipation. This tension constitutes the postcolonial condition.

“. . . [the IMF and the World Bank have] the feel of the colonial ruler. . . they help to create a dual economy in which there are pockets of wealth . . . But a dual economy is not a developed economy. It is re-production of dual, unequal economies as effects of globalization that render poorer societies more vulnerable to the 'culture of conditionality' through which what is purportedly the granting of loans turn[s] into the peremptory enforcement of policy.” between the cultures of the oppressed and those of the ***privileged.*** (Stiglitz, 2002, p. 40; of the World Bank.)

In postcolonial cultures, such as the Philippines, there are fertile grounds for the analysis of both old and new types of colonial influence. While at first blush it would seem that some of the analyses and solutions such as the Black Consciousness of Biko's Africa and the Black Panthers in the United States would not apply. But poverty itself creates essentially a class/caste system with effects on self-image, desire, introjection of the values, language, habits of the oppressor, and even shame over one's own country's or culture's underachieving, and it's dysfunctions. These sorts of pathologies probably are holdovers from earlier colonial times, but the contextual social conditions continue to support them and probably involve similar psychological dynamics. For example, dermal and hair bleaching, rampant in the Philippines may have different dynamics and manifestations as a function of social stratification.

“. . . the phenomena of a ‘white mask psychology’ such as socially induced ‘inferiority complexes’, practices of ‘lactification’, the neurotic compulsion to be white, etc.—Fanon shows how what might otherwise be understood within a purely psychological framework is far better explained in political terms, that is, with reference to understandings of racialized power, colonial violence and cultural subordination”. (Hook, 2005, p. 481.)

Neocolonial conditions exist not only in colonial, postcolonial, quasi-colonial, and totalitarian cultures, but also even in neo-liberal democratic cultures. So the question arises as to how the ‘dual economies’ of Stiglitz are maintained and do they involve a different aspect of psychopolitical dynamics, that is, new psychological concepts? How they are maintained is rather straightforward. Global capitalism has the expensive infrastructure to move capital around in femtosecond instants, to take advantage of shifting labor and production costs very rapidly, to manipulate public desire, to corrupt public officials, and to manipulate national and international laws and interest rates. (Deibert, 1997).

		
Rizal, del Pilar, Ponce	España y Filipinas, Luna	Communal well at Banica R. Bridge

“There has been a remarkable growth in transnational microeconomic links over the past thirty years or so, comprising markets and production facilities that are designated by the awkward term ‘offshore’. . . In this offshore area, sourcing, production, and marketing are organized within ‘global factories,’ in some instances ‘global offices,’ and most recently the “global lab”—real-time transnational information flows being the raw material of all three. Financial transactions take place in various “Euro” facilities, which may be housed in Tokyo, New York, and European financial centers but which are considered to exist in an extranational realm. Cross-investment among the leading firms or other means of forging transnationalized changes increasingly are the norm. Trade is made up disproportionately of intrafirm transactions as opposed to the conventional arms-length exchange that is the staple of economic models and policy. And, the financial sector, which historically (and in theory) is assumed to follow and service the “real” sector, now dwarfs it completely. “To conclude, material changes may have awakened both a need and a desire for this broad transformation in the prevailing social episteme, which produced fundamentally new spatial forms. And entrepreneurial rulers could and did try to exploit those new images and ideas to advance their interests. Nevertheless, the breadth and depth of these changes argue, at the very least, in favor of a relative autonomy for the realm of social epistemology.” (Ruggie, 1993, pp. 141. 160.)

Note Ruggie’s subtlety of pointing to language and ‘social episteme’ as the basis of new transnational reality, which thus resides in the common perception, rather than in formal documentation. In so doing, he has provided a new example of the interaction of psychology, economics, and politics. While his language is a bit stiff and academically polite, one can read the corporate psychology as a ruthless exploitation of the transnational realm operating in the absence of legal constraints, lost in the grip of the ‘social episteme’ which obscures the politics

while accepting the promise of the availability of goods at lower prices. This would bring in not only psycholinguistics, but the discourse of poststructuralists, such as Derrida and Kristeva, which contains a great deal of a psychology.

In the Philippines, these considerations might suggest that many of the international goods we consume could be just as well manufactured here, with local labor, which would involve we psychologists in public discussions and forums like Friere's 'pedagogy of the oppressed', which is action, liberation oriented, and while ostensibly it is liberation education, it is at the same time psychological in nature. All these factors have to be involved in changing the political realities to permit real emancipation

In conclusion

We see three forms of resistance to the powers of oppression, and a frustration as to how to proceed with the deployment of resistance. One form is the mature Rizal-Bhabha emergence of a critical theoretical blueprint for resistance emerging from a multicultural intellectual discourse. A second is the carnivalesque of Bakhtin, seen in political humor and satire of TV comics such as Stewart, Colbert, Leno, Letterman, the street drama of student protests at economic summits, and political cartoons. And the third is grass-roots direct confrontation with authority, seen in the ousters of Marcos and Erap, the current Arab Spring, and the Occupy Wall Street-type movements. The Philippines is in a unique position to move critical psychology from a mainly theoretical framework, into research and action incorporating the latest ideas of existential-humanistic psychology such as empathy, learned helplessness, positive psychology, constructivism, and psychosemiotics. We have an opportunity to move Philippine psychology to the forefront of critical psychology and into political action. It is time to fight poverty and the exploitation of minority cultures.

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