

PSYCHOANALYSIS AND POLITICS

A community of thought since 2010

Statement in support of Black Lives Matter



The world has been shocked by the recent murder of George Floyd, and protests in solidarity have taken places in cities round the world, mobilizing tens and hundreds of thousand people.

Psychoanalysis and Politics would like to express our support for and solidarity with Black Lives Matter-activists and anti-fascists worldwide. Racist violence does not only take physical but also psychological forms, and psychological violence too has a bodily as well as a mental impact. Racism is, in short, a major public health problem both for mental health and physiological health.

Psychoanalysis and Politics has engaged with issues of racism and discrimination since its beginnings in 2010, reflected in the title of the first conference, Exclusion and the Politics of Representation, and in later themes concerned with nationalism and xenophobia, shared traumas, migration, colonialism, solidarity and alienation, power and oppression. Though at stake here is not just what themes we engage with but also, equally, in how we engage with them. Our aim is to represent and include a wide range of people from different countries, language-areas and backgrounds, and respect for each other is key. Therefore, the statutes state that “We aim to be non-discriminatory and egalitarian. Disrespect or discrimination towards the forum or any of its participants on the basis of nationality, skin colour, ethnicity, religion, gender or sexuality will not be tolerated.”

We are right to take to the streets in protest against oppressive state violence, and to protest in other ways, such as in writing. Another part of working against racism and for equality is to examine the practices we ourselves take part in on a daily basis, as readers and writers, speakers, listeners and practitioners. Whom do we read, whom do we cite, what voices do we listen to and take seriously? And to play on Nathaniel Adam Tobias Coleman's title "Why is my curriculum white?", we might ask, "Why is my therapist or analyst white?", and what does that do to how the world is perceived through the analytic gaze? Rationality and Objectivity as presented in the universities has been and largely remains overwhelmingly white and male. In a similar vein the situatedness of the subject who inquires stands in need of critical examination. In a clinical context, Group analyst Farhad Dalal notes in the book *Race, Colour and the Processes of Racialization* (Routledge, 2002) that many black people's experience of living in Britain today:

is of being caught in a powerful pincer movement, one prong of which is racism and the other the denial of racism. This, then, is the black context that informs how s/he *might* hear comments from a white therapist. [...] So, how might a black patient hear an interpretation from the white therapist, in this instance, the experience of social oppression, as a reflection of his or her inner dynamic? The black patient is quite likely to view such an interpretation with suspicion, in effect hearing the therapist saying 'you have a chip on your shoulder, and what you experience as the racist edifice does not exist'. [...] The alternative hypothesis I am putting forward is that *at times* it is more useful to begin by explicitly accepting this presented experience of social reality, which then allows the patient to begin working with the internal.

Systemic and structural inequalities is also a serious problem within mental health care more generally.

As a UK study from 2019 showed, Black Caribbean patients with psychosis are more likely to be coercively treated under the powers of the Mental Health Act than White patients, and are less likely to receive psychologically-based interventions.

In various ways, in our daily lives, we take part in practices that are also oppressive, and sometimes support them unconsciously. Each of us has a responsibility for holding powerful actors to account, and also to critically examine our own participation. Some are much more powerful and influential than others, thus their responsibility is greater. Though for most of us it is worth examining what contribution we can make, however small, towards a more just and equal society for all.

Black Lives Matter! ;No Pasarán!

References

Tackling impact of racism is key to reducing mental health inequalities <https://www.manchester.ac.uk/discover/news/tackling-impact-of-racism/>

Why is My Curriculum White?
<https://www.nus.org.uk/en/news/why-is-my-curriculum-white/>

Image: Black Lives Matter manifestation in Stockholm June 3, 2020, by Frankie Fouganthin, Wikimedia Commons.