

Book Review

Review of *Freud and Said: Contrapuntal Psychoanalysis as Liberation Praxis* by Robert K. Beshara. Switzerland: Palgrave Macmillan, 2020. xvii + 208 pages. ISBN 978-303056742.

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If Said repressed Freud in his seminal 1978 text *Orientalism* (as *Freud and Said* argues), then this very repression (and Freud's enduring influence on Said in general) has been repressed in the academic literature since, to the point that psychoanalysis and de-/post-colonialism are not only not seen as complementary fields, but analyzing their intersection is even deemed suspect. It is this (repressed) relation that Robert K. Beshara seeks to emphasize in *Freud and Said: Contrapuntal Psychoanalysis as Liberation Praxis* (2020), through a close reading of Said's *Beginnings: Intention and Method* (1975), *Orientalism* (1978), and *Freud and the Non-European* (2003). Yet this is not merely an intellectual exercise, as exploring the connection between Freud and Said, and therefore between psychoanalysis and de-/post-colonialism, has immediate ramifications for our current political and theoretical situation. As Beshara writes, the goal of this project is "to decolonize Freud... and... to psychoanalyze Said", or, alternatively, to "decolonize psychoanalysis [and] psychoanalyze coloniality" (Beshara, 2020, pp. 14, 42). It is thus this properly ethical motivation that animates this book, and what gives it its force and vitality. This can be seen in the constant return to the present-day political reality of ongoing oppression of minority groups interwoven throughout the text, as its theoretical interventions are directly connected to their political and ethical ramifications.

In fact, the book begins with a brief outline of the history of colonialism and racism, before offering an overview on the history of the development of de-/post-colonialism, especially as it intersects with psychoanalysis, with summaries of the works of Wilhelm Reich, Octave Mannoni, Frantz Fanon, Albert Memmi, Paulo Freire, Joel Kovel, Ashis Nandy, Hussein A. Bulhan, Homi K. Bhabha, and others. It thus serves as a resource for tracing the lineage of a decolonial psychoanalysis. And yet, for all this, what does decolonial psychoanalysis entail?

According to Beshara, it is "an effort to theorize oppressor/oppressed subjectivities" (Beshara, 2020, p. 2). This has both theoretical and clinical implications, meaning that injecting a view of how colonialism produces subjectivities of both oppressors and oppressed can be used to analyze colonialism as a historical reality, and that this analysis itself can then inform psychoanalytic practices in the clinic. The theoretical import of this stance is perhaps most clear in Beshara's discussion of *Orientalism*, where the Orientalist (ideological) fantasy is psychoanalyzed as "a battery of desires, repressions, investments, and projections" (Said, 1978, p. 8; Beshara, 2020, pp. 114-115). As Said himself notes, *Orientalism* "has less to do with the Orient than it does with 'our' world" (Said, 1978, p. 12). Thus, psychoanalysis can be used to analyze the unconscious investments that undergird the oppressor's worldview, in this case the "wish to dominate the Orient and Orientals sexually and politically" (Beshara, 2020, p. 124). But psychoanalysis can also be mobilized in order to analyze how colonialism and colonialist ideology affects the psyche of the colonized, and it is here that the novelty of Beshara's line of thought is made most clear, in the development of the notion of the "double-unconsciousness" (Beshara, 2020, p. 178). If, as Lacan maintains in *Seminar XI*, that "the unconscious is the

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discourse of the Other”, then, Beshara contends, the colonial subject, following Du Bois’ notion of the “double-consciousness”, also contains a “double-unconsciousness”, the result of the two Others, coloniality and decoloniality (Lacan, 1978, p. 131). Furthermore, following Lacan in connecting the unconscious to language, this sense of double-unconsciousness is perhaps made most explicit in the colonial subject caught between a native and a colonially-imposed language, which preoccupied Fanon, Césaire, and Memmi (Lacan, 1978, p. 20). In fact, does Fanon’s *Black Skin, White Masks* not perfectly signify this tension occurring in the colonized subject’s conscious and unconscious? Beshara emphasizes that modern language is never neutral, but is rather the site and result of colonial contestation, as he makes clear by way of reference to the erasure of indigenous culture and language through the imposition of boarding schools, and the modern-day criminalization of Arabic within the context of the War on Terror (Beshara, 2020, pp. 167, 177, 49).

This connection between Islamophobia and anti-indigenous sentiment and repression is made more explicit through another association, the use of the Apache warrior name “Geronimo” as the codename for Bin Laden, linking indigeneity to terrorism (Beshara, 2020, p. 118). This follows from the attempt to link Islamophobia and anti-Semitism, exemplified in the term *Muselmann* used to refer to starving concentration camp victims (Beshara, 2020, p. 144). It is through uniting in our shared struggles that we can truly enact a liberation praxis, and these theoretical connections offer just such a bridge for doing so. As Beshara argues, if “the unconscious is the discourse of the Other, this Other must be liberated”, and this will require solidaric political action (Beshara, 2020, p. 11). This brings us to Beshara’s politics of determinate negation, which he theorizes in connection to anti-racism and humanism, but that can also be applied to psychoanalysis itself (Beshara, 2020, pp. 21, 48, 161).

If Freud and Said, in *Moses and Monotheism* and *Freud and the Non-European*, respectively, insist that Jewish identity, and therefore every identity, can only be founded on its otherness, on non-identity, on a kernel of ex-timacy, then the same holds true for psychoanalysis, which is that it can only live up to its founding spirit, it can only become itself, from outside of itself, from its encounter with other disciplines, including de-/post-colonialism. If an insistence on a self-identical, coherent Jewish identity purged of any trace of otherness can only lead to the terror of present Zionism and the Israeli state, with the physical repression of Palestinians accompanying a psychical repression of Jewish identity as anything other-than-European (also embodied in the forced sterilization of Ethiopian Jews), then the insistence on a self-standing psychoanalysis shorn of interface with any other discipline can only lead to abuses both within the clinic and the theoretical space, an inadequacy to live up to the political realities of colonialism, racism, patriarchy, hetero- and cis-normativity, ableism, and all other modes of oppression today. Psychoanalysis is thus founded outside of itself, within the political domain, as a liberatory practice, and contrapuntal psychoanalysis as liberation praxis gives back to psychoanalysis its own extimate kernel. If, as Said and Jacqueline Rose maintain, Freud is a non-European (his Jewish identity meaning he was otherized in an anti-Semitic Austria), then psychoanalysis is non-Eurocentric, born within Europe yet only from a point of alterity, but only if we make it so (Said, 2003, p. 70). It is only by betraying psychoanalysis that we can stay true to it, and only by insisting on maintaining fidelity to psychoanalysis in its beleaguered current state can we truly betray it. This is the “non-identity politics” championed by Beshara, and if al-Andalus stands for the non-identity of Europe, then so does psychoanalysis as part of the “radical Jewish tradition”, as Stephen Frosh maintains (Beshara, 2020, pp. 145, 173, 141). This insistence on betraying psychoanalysis (as it is currently constituted) in order to maintain fidelity to it (in its liberatory spirit or potential) is perhaps the most significant implication of this work, and de-/post-colonialism is a central component in allowing us to do so. Thus,

Beshara's work is pivotal to the future of both disciplines, which has ramifications for our political future as well. In this sense, its importance cannot be overstated. As Beshara contends, antihumanism is a "theoretical privilege [that] seems absurd for those of us who were never considered human to begin with", and it is this injection of (Fanon's new) humanism into the psychoanalytic discourse that provides a much-needed respite from the often stultifying and even hostile environment engendered within certain psychoanalytic and even leftist circles (Beshara, 2020, p. 157). Thus, *Freud and Said* is a must-read for anyone engaged in the psychoanalytic or de-/post-colonial fields, as well as for anyone invested in a liberatory practice through engagement with leftist politics, for its theoretical, political, and ethical imports alike.

References

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