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Ian Parker (2020) *Psychology Through Critical Auto-Ethnography: Academic discipline, professional practice and reflexive history*. London, Routledge, 341pp (ISBN 9780367344177) Pbk £39.99

Ian Parker is a critical psychologist, practicing psychoanalyst, prolific author and lifelong political activist. His latest book incorporates all these aspects of his life as he discusses his journey through psychology, from his days as a young undergraduate through his academic career which saw him appointed as a Professor of Psychology, and ending with the circumstances surrounding his resignation from his professorial position. (Here, I should concede, I am based at the same university, although I did not work in the same Department as the author).

As an auto-ethnography it is not surprising that Parker's life-journey and reflections permeate the book. However, he goes much further than this as he critically dissects numerous psychological, philosophical and political theories and traditions.

The book is divided into five sections: Studying psychology; Psychological research; Teaching psychology; Going critical and Institutional crises. In each, he weaves his personal journey within psychology and his encounters with various activists and theorists to highlight the often coercive and reductive nature of mainstream psychology. To which we could, of course, add other disciplines such as social work, which can also be a means to categorise and control those who do not fit into prescribed social roles (see also Garrett, 2018).

Part five of the book comprises four chapters, the first three of which (chapters 17-19) detail his time and exit from his professorial position at Manchester Metropolitan University in 2013. Chapter 19, with an obvious nod to Foucault, has the subtitle 'Discipline and Punish' and details the increasing managerialism, micro-management and disciplinary procedures he was subjected to, something that many academics will relate to, and which have continued apace since. This process has also had a negative effect on academic freedom as professors began to be incorporated into management positions and encouraged to concentrate on bringing in external research income. This is something that was made explicitly clear to him when his senior managers told him that

his objectives for the forthcoming year should be to 'reduce the number of publications, take a management role and put in some bids for research funding' (p.291).

Parker is careful not to individualise or psychologise the actions of the various actors discussed. His main aim is to locate events within a political and organisational landscape in which people comply and/or resist depending on position, power and political leanings. Clearly, we are only given a partial account; it is, after all, an *auto-ethnography*. I am sure many of the people mentioned in the book would dispute the accuracy of the author's account. We cannot, of course, simply replay the past by having recourse to a DVD or video-recording. Often, our feelings in the present influence how we interpret the past. Parker is too intelligent not to know this, and there is some discussion of this when he acknowledges that memory is a collective process (pp. 309-10). Parker also borrows from Sir Frederic Bartlett the phrase that memory is 'a war of the ghosts', but a more detailed discussion of this theoretical – and, indeed, philosophical – dimension might have been welcomed by readers.

However, this point cannot detract from the fact that this is a remarkable and erudite description of Parker's journey through psychology. What is more, it is much more than this, given we are presented with an intellectual and political critique of the way much psychological theory and practice reduces our humanity by compartmentalising and labelling our experiences. This, moreover, is rooted in the dominant tendency to ascribe mental distress to merely individual or micro-societal malfunction.

Parker concludes the book warning us of the way the term 'psychology', speaks of a 'domain of individual behaviour and of an interior world that has been separated off from our relationships with others, from competing contradictory forms of culture, from ideology that feeds the illusion about who we are and who we can be, and from power which enforces the shape of the social world' (p.321). In short, it represents a reduced and diminished view of what it is to be human.

This book may be titled as 'auto-ethnography', but it is also a political and social critique, not only of psychology but also of a prevailing social system that inhibits our ability to fully flourish as human beings. As such, it is essential reading for those involved with psychology, but it also relates directly to facets of social policy, which often borrows from psychological thinking. Indeed, academics from whatever discipline will recognise some of the institutional changes Parker describes. More generally, students of sociology, social theory, politics and critical social theory will have much to learn from reading *Psychology Through Critical Auto-Ethnography*. I cannot recommend it highly enough.

References

Garrett, P. M. (2018) 'Disrupting, destabilising and declassifying: Jacques Rancière's potential contribution to social work', *International Social Work*, 61 (1): 106-118.

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