

A DEEPER CUT

The Political Mind Series
edited by David Morgan

The Unconscious in Social and Political Life (2019)

A DEEPER CUT
Further Explorations
of the Unconscious in Social
and Political Life

Edited by
David Morgan



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Tell Them

Tell them (they have names)
and when they turn the bodies over
to count the number of closed eyes.
And they tell you 800,000: you say no. That was my uncle.
He wore bright coloured shirts and pointy shoes.
2 million: you say no. That was my aunty.
Her laughter could sweep you up like
the wind to leaves on the ground.
6 million: you say no. That was my mother.
Her arms. The only place I have ever
not known fear.
3 million: you say no. that was my love.
We used to dance. Oh, how we used to dance.
Or 147: you say no. that was our hope. Our future. The brains of
the family.
And when they tell you that you come from war: you say no.
I come from hands held in prayer before we eat together.
When they tell you that you come from conflict: you say no.
I come from sweat.
On skin. Glistening. From shining sun.
When they tell you that you come from genocide: you say no.
I come from the first smile of a new born child. Tiny hands.
When they tell you that you come from rape: you say no. And you
tell them about every time you have ever loved.
Tell them that you are from mother carrying you on her back.
Until you could walk.
Until you could run. Until you could fly.
Tell them that you are from father holding you up to the night sky.
Full of stars. And saying look, child. This is what you are made of.
From long summers. Full moons. Flowing rivers. Sand dunes.
You tell them that you are an ocean that no cup could ever hold.

JJ Bola
Poet

*To exist is the artist's greatest pride. He desires no other paradise than
existence, love the existence of the thing more than yourself*

*Osip Mandelstam
"The Morning of Acmeism"*

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Acknowledgements

This is the second book that has developed out of the Political Mind Seminars at the British Psychoanalytical Society. Since the last book we have all been plunged into a catastrophe, in the form of a global pandemic. Lives have been irreversibly altered, affected by death, illness, or economic strife. The after-effects of this trauma will last for a very long time. The economic consequences will probably lead to further polarisation in society between the have-nots and the “have mores”. The danger of populism may be used to provide simplistic jingoistic alternatives to real change. While suddenly healthcare workers are the underpaid but appreciated heroes. There has never been a more urgent need for good political leadership and the ability to think.

I am deeply indebted to my colleagues who provide their wisdom and maturity in these pages. I hope others find their thoughts helpful.

I would like to say thank you to Ruth McCall without whose continuous support and intelligence these initiatives would not have happened. Also Freya and Will for their lives, which always inspire me. Also Leo, Alex, Alexa, Mylinh, and Pandora for being in the world. I would also like to express my heartfelt gratitude to Patricia.

Also a thank you to the great Sophie Kemp and Julie Norris at Kingsley Napley for keeping the spirit of Atticus alive.

*David Morgan
Lambs Orchard*

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About the editor and contributors

Professor, the Lord Alderdice, FRCPsych, played a significant role in the negotiation of the 1998 Good Friday Agreement as leader of the Alliance Party of Northern Ireland. He was the first speaker of the new Northern Ireland Assembly until 2004 when he was appointed to the Independent Monitoring Commission tasked by the British and Irish Governments with security normalisation and closing down terrorist activity in Northern Ireland. He was president of Liberal International, the global federation of more than 100 liberal political parties (now “président d’honneur”), and chairman of the Liberal Democrat Party in the House of Lords. His work on fundamentalism, radicalisation, and terrorism in various parts of the world has been recognised with many honorary degrees, prizes, and awards and he is currently director of the Centre for the Resolution of Intractable Conflict at Harris Manchester College (Oxford, UK), chairman of the Centre for Democracy and Peace Building (Belfast, Northern Ireland), and a clinical professor in the Department of Psychiatry at the University of Maryland (Baltimore, USA).

Dr Elizabeth Cotton is a writer and educator working in the field of mental health at work. Her background is in workers' education and international development. She has worked in more than thirty-five countries on diverse issues such as HIV/AIDS, organising and building grassroots networks, and negotiating and bargaining with employers as head of education for IndustriALL, one of the largest trade unions in the world, reflected in her book *Global Unions Global Business* (Libri). She teaches and writes as an academic at Cardiff Metropolitan University about employment relations and mental health. She is editor-in-chief of an ABS4 British Sociological Association journal, *Work, Employment & Society* and blogs as www.survivingwork.org, a network of 30,000 people. In 2017 she published a national survey about working conditions in mental health, www.thefutureoftherapy.org and her current research is focused on the "Uberisation" of therapy. She set up www.survivingworkinhealth.org, a free resource in partnership with the Tavistock and Portman NHS Foundation Trust and her accompanying book *Surviving Feeling Work in Healthcare: Helpful Stuff for People on the Frontline* (Gower, 2017) was nominated for the Chartered Management Institute's practitioner book of the year.

Dr Tomasz Fortuna trained as a psychoanalyst at the Institute of Psychoanalysis in London. He is a member of the British Psychoanalytical Society and the Hanna Segal Institute for Psychoanalytic Studies. He has worked as a psychiatrist in the NHS for fifteen years, and currently he works at the Portman Clinic with adults, children, and adolescents and is in private psychoanalytic practice. He teaches and supervises in the UK and abroad. His professional interests include the relationship between psychoanalysis and the arts, the understanding of severe emotional disturbance, and criminal behaviour. He has published several articles and chapters, and co-authored the book *Melanie Klein: The Basics*. He was a guest editor of *Empedocles, European Journal for the Philosophy of Communication*.

Professor Stephen Frosh is professor in the Department of Psychosocial Studies (which he founded) at Birkbeck, University of London. He was pro-vice-master of Birkbeck from 2003 to 2017. He has a background in academic and clinical psychology and was consultant clinical

psychologist at the Tavistock Clinic, London, throughout the 1990s. He is the author of many books and papers on psychosocial studies and on psychoanalysis. His books include *Hauntings: Psychoanalysis and Ghostly Transmissions, Feelings, A Brief Introduction to Psychoanalytic Theory, Psychoanalysis Outside the Clinic: Interventions in Psychosocial Studies, Hate and the Jewish Science: Anti-Semitism Nazism and Psychoanalysis, For and Against Psychoanalysis, After Words: The Personal in Gender, Culture and Psychotherapy. The Politics of Psychoanalysis: An Introduction to Freudian and Post-Freudian Theory, Sexual Difference: Masculinity and Psychoanalysis, Identity Crisis: Modernity, Psychoanalysis and the Self*. His most recent book is *Those Who Come After: Postmemory, Acknowledgement and Forgiveness* (London: Palgrave, 2019). He is a fellow of the Academy of Social Sciences, an academic associate of the British Psychoanalytical Society, a founding member of the Association of Psychosocial Studies, and an honorary member of the Institute of Group Analysis.

Samir Gandesha is currently an associate professor in the Department of the Humanities and the director of the Institute for the Humanities at Simon Fraser University, British Columbia, Canada. He specialises in modern European thought and culture, with a particular emphasis on the relation between politics, aesthetics, and psychoanalysis. He has contributed chapters to numerous volumes and also papers to a wide range of journals.

He is co-editor with Lars Rensmann of *Arendt and Adorno: Political and Philosophical Investigations* (Stanford, 2012), and co-editor with Johan Hartle of *Spell of Capital: Reification and Spectacle* (University of Amsterdam Press, 2017) and *Aesthetic Marx* (Bloomsbury Press, 2017) also with Johan Hartle.

He is editor of *Spectres of Fascism: Historical, Theoretical and International Perspectives* (Pluto, 2020), and co-editor (with Peyman Vahabzadeh) of *Crossing Borders: Essays in Honour of Ian Angus, Beyond Phenomenology and Critique in Honour of Ian Angus* (Arbeiter Ring, 2020). In the spring of 2017, he was the Liu Boming Visiting Scholar in Philosophy at the University of Nanjing and visiting lecturer at Soochow University of Science and Technology in China. In January 2019, he was visiting fellow at the Hochschule für Gestaltung in Karlsruhe, Germany, and in February of the same year, he was visiting lecturer at Faculdade

de Filosofia, Letras e Ciências Humanas—FFLCH-USP (Universidade de São Paulo, Brazil).

Dr Mary-Joan Gerson is adjunct clinical professor, consultant in psychoanalysis, and former director of the Advanced Specialization in Couple and Family Therapy at the New York University Postdoctoral Program in Psychotherapy and Psychoanalysis. She is founding president of Section VIII, Couples and Family Therapy, of Division 39 (Psychoanalysis), as well as founding co-chair of the Committee on Psychoanalysis and Health Care, and the Committee on Psychoanalysis and the Community, for Division 39 (Psychoanalysis) of the American Psychological Association.

She is author of *The Embedded Self: An Integrative Psychodynamic and Systemic Perspective on Couples and Family Therapy*, published in 2009 by Routledge Psychoanalysis. Her numerous publications have appeared in such journals as *Contemporary Psychoanalysis*, *Psychoanalytic Psychology*, *The Journal of Psychotherapy Integration*, *Social Science and Medicine*, and *Family Systems Medicine*.

Mary-Joan Gerson has been awarded a Fulbright Specialist Award, which took her to Namibia in August 2013 to consult with psychologists and other healthcare workers at the University of Namibia and government ministries. Dr Gerson was recently awarded the Florence Kaslow Distinguished Contribution to International Family Psychology Award (2012), by Division 43 (Family Psychology) of the American Psychological Association.

Liz Greenway has worked for more than fifteen years as a psychotherapist in GP surgeries, charities, and private practice with a broad range of individuals including those on the edge of society who are homeless, entrepreneurs, elderly, working professionals in government, law, health, charities, social care, education and corporate environments, actors, stay-at-home parents, family businesses. As a psychodynamic organisational therapist, integrative psychotherapist, and cognitive analytic therapy practitioner she has substantial experience across private, public, and voluntary sectors, and in group relations. Her organisational consultancy, reflective practice, and professional role consultation considers

dynamic issues beneath the surface and relationships at work in context. She has also worked in clinical commissioning groups. She has a background in adult education. She is published in the *Organisational and Social Dynamics* journal and received, for scholarly excellence, Best Paper Award from the University of Missouri's Center for the Study of Organizational Change in 2014. She has a chapter in the recently published *Psychoanalytic Thinking on the Unhoused Mind* (Routledge, 2019). She has presented her work at various conferences. Additionally, she is a doctoral candidate in consultation and the organisation at the Tavistock and Portman NHS Foundation Trust for which the subject of her research is the impact of challenging work contexts on professionals in role, a concept of broad application in working life. She remains particularly interested in enabling environments to facilitate creativity, sustainability, and recovery.

Roger Hartley is a retired civil servant. His postgraduate research was in the sociology of literature, on George Orwell. He then taught English literature and cultural studies at the University of Sussex, and subsequently was a civil servant for some twenty-three years in Whitehall. He has a long-standing interest in psychoanalysis, which includes an analysis with Donald Meltzer in the 1980s.

David Morgan is a consultant psychotherapist and psychoanalyst, and a fellow of the British Psychoanalytical Society. He is a training analyst and supervisor at the British Psychoanalytic Association and at the British Psychotherapy Foundation, and a lecturer recognised nationally and internationally. He is the editor of *The Unconscious in Social and Political Life* (2019), and co-editor (with Stanley Ruczynski) of *Violence, Delinquency and Perversion* (2007), and has authored many chapters and papers. He is currently a director of Public Interest Psychology Ltd, as well as a member of the IPA committee on Humanitarian Organisations. He is the chair of The Political Mind Seminars, co-chair and editor with Kurt Jacobson of the Psychoanalysis and Public Sphere Conference and the *Free Association* journal, and was chair of Frontier Psychoanalyst, a radio broadcast series on Resonance FM. He is also a member of the Think Tank on Resolution of Intractable Conflict.

Luisa Passalacqua, MA, MNCS, is an integrative counsellor and an independent researcher and consultant in psychological anthropology with a background in occupational and organisational psychology as well as anthropology of art. Her experience ranges from professional training and continuing education to arts therapies, which she has practised privately as a qualified dramatherapist, having been a member of the British Association of Dramatherapists (UK) and the North American Drama Therapy Association (USA) for many years. She has published several arts therapies-related articles in the journal *Arti Terapie*, one in *The Dramatherapy Journal* (1995), and the book *Guarire con le Arti Drammatiche [Healing through Dramatic Arts]* (2008). She is currently interested in the “unrepresented” escaping the verbal mapping of daily life, particularly invisible interpersonal processes that culminate in the creation of narratives as they become social and political, which she shows on screen using audio-visual media. Her first ethnographic film *Red on White* (2020) is on pre-adolescent girls’ corporeality, and will be followed by *S(e)oul* (in production) on urban shamanism. She is currently working on her next essay, *The Science of Forgiveness*.

Dr Kate Pugh is a consultant psychiatrist in psychotherapy working in the NHS alongside practising as a psychoanalyst. She teaches psychoanalytic concepts to mental health workers in London and abroad.

Dr Marco Puricelli is a psychologist and psychotherapist. With a background in psychological science and techniques, neural networks (which he had studied since his master’s degree in engineering for the environment at Politecnico University in Milan), as well as neuropsychology and clinical psychology, he qualified in Adlerian-oriented psychotherapy in Turin, with a thesis in the psychology of religion. He contributed to *Forms of Intersubjectivity—the Explicit and Implicit in Interpersonal Relations*, edited by Lucia Carli and Carlo Rodini (2007) and his article with Lucia Carli, “The Contribution of Nonlinear Dynamics to the Notion of Change”, was published in the *Italian Journal of Psychology* (2014). He is the author of *Dio o super-dio? Vere e false rappresentazioni di Dio [God or Super-Ego? True and False Representations of God]* (2011), *Rappresentazioni di Dio: deformazioni e negazioni [Depictions of God: Deformations and Negations]* (2013), and *Traumi infantili e genesi*

dell'odio verso se stessi e gli altri [Childhood Trauma and the Source of Hatred towards Self and Others] (2015). Marco consistently applies Alice Miller insights into his daily clinical practice, integrating her thoughts and intuitions with other psychotherapeutic techniques.

From 2010 to 2017 he was a teaching assistant for dynamic psychology and advanced dynamic psychology at the faculty of psychology at the Bicocca University of Milan. He currently works as a psychotherapist in private practice in Milan, mainly with adults, while he is referent counsellor for teenagers and adolescents in a public clinic in Gallarate (not far from Milan).

He leads lectures and seminars in the psychology of religion.

Dr Edgard Sanchez Bernal is a consultant psychiatrist and a psychoanalyst and a fellow of the British Psychoanalytical Society. He works in the NHS for South London and Maudsley NHS Trust, based at King's College London Student Services. He also works at his private practice. He has written papers on clinical issues including free association, transference, termination in psychoanalytic settings, and deliberate self-harm. He is a founding member and co-chair of the Freudian Study Group.

Elisabeth Skale, MD, is a psychiatrist, a member and training analyst at the Vienna Psychoanalytic Society, a coordinator of the Department of Theory/History/Culture of the Vienna Psychoanalytic Academy, as well as Austrian consultant of the European Psychoanalytic Film Festival. She has written papers on clinical and technical issues of psychoanalysis. She currently works in private practice and the Vienna Psychoanalytic Clinic.

Professor Mark Stein is chair in leadership and management at the University of Leicester, UK. He has been a senior lecturer at Imperial College London and a research fellow at the London School of Economics and Brunel University. He has also had a long-standing connection with INSEAD, France, where he has been an adjunct professor and visiting scholar. For many years Mark has also been connected with the Tavistock Institute and Clinic. He was employed by the Tavistock Institute as a researcher and consultant; undertook observational studies at the Tavistock Clinic; and has also been on the staff of group relations

events at the Clinic and Institute, including the “Leicester Conference”. Mark was awarded the Gavin Macfadyen Memorial Essay Prize for the paper on the gang published in this volume. He has also received an Emerald Citation of Excellence; the “Group & Organization Management” best paper prize; the Richard Normann Prize; and the iLab Prize for innovative scholarship.

Margot Waddell is a fellow of the Institute of Psychoanalysis and a child analyst. She has a background in classics and English literature. She has taught at the Institute over many years and is currently the chair of publications there. She has worked for more than thirty years as a consultant child and adolescent psychotherapist at the Tavistock Clinic, London, where she continues to contribute as a visiting lecturer. She has edited the Tavistock Clinic Book Series since its inception in 1998. An extended version of her book *Inside Lives: Psychoanalysis and the Growth of the Personality* was published by Karnac in 2002, *Understanding 12–14-Year-Olds* was published by Jessica Kingsley in 2005, and her latest book, *On Adolescence: Inside Stories*, was published by Routledge in 2018.

Introduction

David Morgan

An olive grower sat outside his olive grove in the sunshine drinking ouzo when a scion of a vast olive oil company offered to help him organise his rather scruffy olive grove into a multimillion dollar enterprise. The owner of the grove replied, “Ah yes, I can get rich so then I could sit in the sunshine drinking my ouzo.”

This is a celebration of Epicurean philosophy about life’s pleasures versus the attractions of material riches. I often think about this while sitting out the current pandemic in 2020. Politics has changed a great deal since the publication of *The Unconscious in Social and Political Life* (Morgan, 2019). We have now been forced indoors to avoid the threat of death and if fortunate enough re-discovered important truths about what is necessary in life. The question being, should we return to “normal” with all that entails for climate change and society as a whole?

The olive grower in the story is able to manage the externalisation of the greed of the businessman, reminding him of pleasures other than economic expansionism and growth. Something we need to reflect on seriously in the face of this virus rather than being sucked into the excesses of unfettered consumerism once again. The themes in Margot Waddell’s thoughtful chapter, “‘Ill fares the land’: reflections on

The Merchant of Venice—a tale for modern times”, which investigates the relationship between internal and external reality, chime here.

Psychoanalysts try to bring much-needed nourishment to the minds of their patients, some of whom are psychotic and severely disturbed. Many valuable theories around psychosis and its causes, such as trauma or unrecognised transgenerational pain, can be applied to understanding some of the current political and social malaise that confronts our time. Take for example a banker patient who worked six days a week, neglecting his children to do so despite having made enough money for several lifetimes. He had panic attacks on Sundays. He tried to make me come to his office saying his time was money and offered me a ton of money to do so. I suggested that he was anxious that I was only interested in his money and did not value the space in which I practised, and bribing me was a way to see if this was true. A reflection of his own battle with finance that had taken over everything in life that was precious. I was surprised to discover that he had seen his parents almost starve and that he had dedicated himself to ensure that this would never happen to him. Although, as we can see, at a different level he was starving.

Another example is Ms M, a creative person whose work always contained images of ice. She broke down with the illusion (with climate change maybe not so much of an illusion) that the next ice age was coming, and she stood outside the Ministry of Defence haranguing passers-by. When I saw her for inpatient therapy, it was clear this was a strong delusion. She would listen to the shipping forecast expecting a special, personal message to tell her that the next ice age was starting. My immediate thought on seeing her was, what had been the last ice age? What emerged in our work was the belief that she was defending herself with this delusional messianic belief system and she would save the world by cutting her wrists. Very early in her life, her mother had a post-puerperal psychosis and had become cold and unavailable to her child. I think my patient believed she was responsible and guilty for this frozen mother and had developed her delusional belief in response; all her defences had to be directed at preventing the ice age she had been through from happening again.

I saw her for many years, in and then outside hospital. As in the story of the ice queen, something defrosted and the pain surrounding her about her early years manifested itself. This included her fury for what

she felt were “the icy attitudes of psychoanalysts toward their patients who they reify with their cold theories”. I was able to explore this belief system that existed between us; it was something that resonated deeply with me, as in my own analysis I had originally found the regimented aspect of analysis and training difficult and relentless.

This meant I had some empathic regard for the patient’s need to hate what was felt by her to be a frozen, cruel, and cold analyst, with his icy theories and setting. At times it would become too much for her (or me) and she was admitted to a ward that was psychoanalytically orientated, where I could continue to see her. This was difficult and exhausting work. Eventually, through a combination of medication and then just therapy, she was able to achieve some stability in her life, free from her overriding delusional system.

If you want people to behave thoughtfully to others, then you have to give them the experience of being thought about, otherwise enactment becomes the only means of communication, where people are only taken seriously due to the thoughtless violence of their actions—the latter an enactment of their own experience of a neglectful world. There was an infamous case in the 1990s of a very distressed man who had been refused admission by several hospitals and who was driven to attack and kill a man who refused to provide him with a light for his cigarette. This refusal led to an enactment of his many years of neglect and rejection. The light for the cigarette concretely represented all this man had suffered and his painful rejection at the hands of uncaring institutions.

Hanna Segal (1957) located the provenance of psychosis in the inability to properly construct a system of mental symbolisation. For the patients she analysed, symbols and the actual things they represented were jumbled and undifferentiated, so that merely uttering a person’s name might inflict upon them concrete physical harm; or like a patient I saw who took as an insult her father’s gift of a bunch of bananas when visiting her in hospital, suggesting that she was mad. Another young woman, having been told when given a hand-me-down coat by her mother that she “would grow into it”, actually waited for many years for buttons to appear on her body.

Early psychoanalytic papers often involved the analysis of a particularly relentless, cruel superego formation that constantly reappears, seemingly destroying progress, with the accompanying extreme loss of

any good object relationship. The ward, at times of acute crisis, used to provide some respite, to both analyst and patient, from this relentlessness. Dr Murray Jackson writes compassionately about this inpatient work in *Unimaginable Storms* (1994) and *Weathering the Storms* (2001), both superlative accounts of the profundity of good analytic inpatient work within the confines of an old mental hospital, as in his justly famous Ward 6. Within this book, Kate Pugh's thoughtful chapter on the politics of psychiatry in the UK shines a light on the ongoing problems with mental health services, as does Liz Greenway's reflective exploration of policies and provisions for mentally ill patients.

Whether inpatient or outpatient, the psychotic patient brings extreme states to the awareness of the analyst. This, I feel, is an exploration of the analyst's capacity to bear unspoken unsymbolised cruelties, but also an exploration of the analyst's ability to find internal or external help from others, in ways the patient or their objects were unable to find. The question being, do you (the analyst) have any more resources than I (the patient) to manage these extremes?

Guilt and psychosis are closely related but often reside in the trans-generational history of the people I see, manifesting as apparent delusional systems when in fact it is often someone having someone else's experience that is unrecognised. Like Christopher Bollas's idea of the unthought known, which I find useful: "The primary repressed must be that inherited disposition that constitutes the core of personality, which has been genetically transmitted, and exists as a potential in psychic space" (Bollas, 1989, p. 78). As a result of working with patients I developed the idea of a research project looking for severe trauma in previous generations of family members of people presenting with apparent delusional belief systems—there was often a strong correlation. The core issue here is that unrecognised painful trauma leads to cruel, icy, suicidal beliefs and powerful psychotic delusions. Luisa Passalacqua and Marco Puricelli's gripping chapter, "Alice Miller on family, power, and truth" includes a look at the long-lasting effects of trauma on individuals.

One method of managing painful insight into one's own internal world is to externalise/project the unthought known issues into someone or something else. Usually this is another person's mind, which is filled with the thoughts and insights that are being repudiated. This is a ubiquitous aspect of what Melanie Klein (1946) described as the

paranoid–schizoid position. The beginnings of maturity, or what she calls the depressive position, is the recognition that what we have previously projected also belongs to us and then we might begin to face the guilt, if we can. The most pernicious aspect of this is a cruel superego formation, an amalgam of severe transgenerational trauma and unprocessed aggression.

Psychoanalysts are therefore familiar with these concepts within the consulting room and within the individual, but realising how deep-seated these psychotic mechanisms are at a collective level is much less recognised. Yet entire societies continue to function at a paranoid–schizoid level, risking splits and projections that can only dangerously reduce the safety of the world. My own chapter looks at the psychological dimensions of defying a perverse or corrupt authority through the actions of the whistleblower. While Lord John Alderdice investigates the psychology of religious fundamentalism and its relationship to group psychology.

The human capacity for a sense of guilt is indicative of individual emotional growth: a defective sense of guilt is not linked to intellectual capacity or incapacity but rather the capacity for guilt is linked to the tolerance of ambivalence within the self. In successful analyses of individuals oppressed by guilt, there is a lessening of guilt, though for some the source of guilt cannot be reached, and for those individuals who feel that they are not able to explain this, it can make for a feeling of madness. I think this can also pertain at the societal level (Winnicott, 1959, p. 44). Mary-Joan Gerson brings us a call to arms to engage with the world outside our consulting rooms, using what we have learned from individuals and applying it to the wider community.

I feel that the ethics of migration involve bringing about an awareness of collective guilt in the West that we wish to obviate by locating it outside ourselves. I suggest that the migrant is a repository of our own fears, carrying a reminder of Western hegemony and the dreaded retaliation or insight it could bring about. We can experience these reminders as persecuting because they remind us of aspects of our cultural history we choose to turn a blind eye to. Tomasz Fortuna's stimulating chapter, "Diversity: notes from the inside and the outside", looks at the links between the internal experience of difference and its external manifestations.

People migrate owing to a need to survive, to find food, and to avoid danger and death by moving towards opportunities for life that many of us here, through luck and, arguably, an aggressive foreign policy, possess. With the history of privilege many of us from the developed West have benefited from, we can feel we are winners of the global quasi “Hunger Games” we live in. Of course the winners want to keep the upper hand and control the fruits of conquest as they, we, always have done. However, I want to suggest that we can think about a global ethical depressive position. Having dominated much of the world through using internal processes of splitting and projection that allow aggressors to attack and exploit, often in the name of survival, I think it is important that we realise that the victims of this exploitation have rights and needs, and that they are the reminders of our collective guilt. We are dangerously distracted from the real causes of our current problems in the West and encouraged to focus on the victims.

The birth of the “Other” in our midst is a reminder of the moral dilemma and the Other is so easily reified, asset-stripped, and turned into a threat. I believe from my work with migrants and asylum seekers that certain historical or cultural factors cause an inhibition of our capacity to think through the significance to us of refugees and immigrants. Central here is the repudiated awareness of our own implication in the horrors the migrant is fleeing, which leads to our unconscious guilt for the depredations of the Western colonial past and our wish to retain power and commodities in the new global economy. Stephen Frosh tackles these issues head on in his insightful exploration into post-colonial thought from a psychoanalytic viewpoint.

The migration debate in Britain is usually dominated by the reporting of economic and cultural concerns. On the surface, the debate appears to be about immigrants and the question of what they claim in state benefits, wages they undercut, jobs they steal, overuse of social resources, and whether the national identity will be diluted and multiculturalism made untenable when “swamped” by the Other. The understanding of the “Return of the Oppressed” can provide an ethical dimension to understanding this propaganda. Roger Hartley’s nuanced take on “George Orwell: politics and the avoidance of reality” resonates here.

Right-wing populist politicians can rely on the paranoid–schizoid fears that reside in us all. We all retain the infantile traces of absolute

dependency on the maternal provider and, as we grow up, this easily relocates itself onto the nation state and government. When politicians tell us our nation state is at risk, we experience infantile anxieties easily converted into blame and resentment. The main purpose of the anti-immigration rhetoric is to deprive the Other of inclusion and political membership. This excluding political rhetoric insists that some people are more significant than others.

As psychoanalysts, surely we do not believe a person's life chances should be determined by arbitrary features such as race, ethnicity, gender, or sexuality, and in a thoughtful, depressive-position world such factors would not determine life chances. The West wants to keep its upper hand. Having exploited, we must now realise that the victims of this exploitation have rights and, I argue, they are the reminder of our collective guilt and a distraction from the true threat in the world, which is the cause, rather than mass migration, which is the symptom.

So, if we dare to think about it ethically, we can see that one main issue underpins this twenty-first-century manifestation of economic anxiety, and the paranoia it induces: power. These hapless immigrants are excluded from the democratic process, which is analogous to men wielding political power over women, the injustice of the white population of South Africa that exercised political power over the black population; that is, coercive power over the excluded, with no opportunity for them to participate as equals. We all agree here, I imagine, that no person is more morally significant than any other, but it was and is this belief in such an insignificance that was projected by the powerful into the excluded to justify the continued exercise of power.

By dividing human societies between those who carry particular attributes, accidents of birth, geographical placement, wealth, education and so on, we create the lucky ones and the unlucky ones, to continue the analogy of the *Hunger Games*. The lucky ones have not earned these attributes, do not “deserve” them, and do not merit special treatment or reward.

We are in a period of time when the West is dominated by neoliberalism and the rise of the right wing. Anxieties around survival lead to a massive split between the “have mores” and the have-nots. Samir Gandesha explores these effects on both right and left populisms in the opening chapter and Elisabeth Skale looks in detail at the rise of the new right from a psychoanalytic perspective in Chapter 14.

We need international solidarity of government, to stop crippling developing countries by stealing their natural resources and stop imposing punitive austerity on developing countries as part of World Bank loans to simply keep the country alive. Edgard Sanchez Bernal's powerful chapter gives us a Third World perspective on power and the manipulation of the masses. Let's say goodbye to unregulated capitalism once and for all. Relentless production takes the place of meeting the needs of the global population, it exploits both the individual and the planet. This is given centre stage with Elizabeth Cotton's informative study of the role of trade unions and the psychodynamics of solidarity in modern society.

Perhaps we need to stop pretending that there is such a thing as a free market. It is a false entity because it's not free, it is always political and involves an abuse of power. Hopefully this book and its sister publication, *The Unconscious in Social and Political Life* (2019), will contribute something, however small, to a move to something better.

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