

# Convulsive Times, Revolutionary Subjects: Reflections on Marxism and Critical Psychology

**Desmond Painter**

Department of Psychology, Stellenbosch University, South Africa

**David Pavón-Cuéllar**

Faculty of Psychology, Universidad Michoacana de San Nicolás de Hidalgo, Mexico

**Leonardo Moncada**

Faculty of Psychology, Universidad Michoacana de San Nicolás de Hidalgo, Mexico

**Abstract.** *This article introduces an edition of the Annual Review of Critical Psychology made up of papers originally presented at the Second Conference of Marxism and Psychology held in Morelia, Mexico, from 9-11 August 2012. We begin by introducing Marxism as a resource for critical psychology, one that is uniquely positioned to link the refusal of psychology, which lies at the core of critical work in the discipline, to a broader refusal of social relations and forms of subjectivity under capitalism and the ideological role psychology itself plays in their reproduction. We then sketch a panoramic overview of critical and reconstructive encounters between Marxism and psychology in various contexts around the world ever since Marx's own reflections on the nature of the psyche, serving as a background to the equally diverse encounters with Marxist theory and politics in the articles making up this edition of the Review. Finally, we zone in on the immediate context of the conference itself, giving substance to the idea that a Marxist critical psychology is one that both inspires and is further developed from forms of collective action, which locates its critique of psychology and capitalism not just in theory, but in practices of everyday life that already articulate and live this double refusal.*

**Keywords:** Critical psychology, Marxism and psychology, Second Congress of Marxism and Psychology, Social movements

Although no single definition of critical psychology exists that could bring together under one banner the disparate and at times contradictory efforts claiming this name, there would be no meaning to the designation at all if it did not entail, at the very least, some sort of *refusal* of psychology in its dominant forms. What gives critical psychology the semblance of a shared agenda, of something approaching a collective practice, despite its diversity, despite often being at odds with itself, is that it positions itself and articulates its refusal of psychology *from within* psychology, seeking to overcome the strictures of the discipline and its practices, and to develop alternatives in and to psychology both through critique and reconstruction. Refusal, of course, can and does take many forms in critical psychology: epistemological, theoretical, methodological and political critiques cohabit

in an uneasy relationship with the discipline, ranging from outright rejection to forms of institutional complicity by which critical psychology, as a more or less loyal opposition to the mainstream, plays its role in the diversification, exportability, and further academic and cultural entrenchment of psychology (Parker, 1999a).

Undeniably, critical psychology is small compared to many other areas of the discipline, but it has certainly gained in visibility and even status over the last number of years and has proven viable as a source of academic distinction for a growing number of individuals employed in departments of psychology around the world. One illustration: at the International Union of Psychological Science' most recent congress, the International Congress of Psychology held

in Cape Town, South Africa, in 2012, critical psychology was for the first time included, alongside developmental psychology, neuropsychology, etc., as a freestanding sub-disciplinary division, an achievement many critical psychologists understandably celebrated. One could add to this the existence of conferences and journals (such as this Annual Review) and the publication, by prestigious academic publishers, of book series, textbooks and, in recent times, a handbook (Parker, 2015) and an encyclopedia (Teo, 2014). It is certainly not outside the realm of possibility that critical psychology might one day even achieve, as happened to qualitative inquiry as recently as 2013, recognition in an APA Division, perhaps with an associated APA journal. The point is that psychology's academic and professional ambitions, and its desire for internationalization ("International Psychology" has long since become an APA Division...) do not preclude the incorporation of *critical* psychology. On the contrary, academic markets in the time of the corporate university are replete with niche offerings; older tokens of academic standing are making way for marketability and commodity value, for an ethos of constant innovation, transformation and re-branding.

The hazard here, for critical approaches that remain unaware of or unable to theorize the political economy of psychology, and to account for its own role within it, is what Parker (1999a) refers to as recuperation: "the process by which radical ideas become neutralized and absorbed; [...] become part of the machinery that they attempted to challenge" (p. 78). The threat is not simply that by becoming an established sub-discipline that peacefully co-exists with other sub-disciplines, critical psychology will unwittingly add momentum, by trading on psychology's institutional success and cultural spread, and by offering it legitimacy and further applicability in some contexts, to the reproduction and further entrenchment of the discipline still primarily in terms of its dominant assumptions and practices. The threat, instead, is that the surplus value afforded the discipline by a 'critical psychology' that distinguishes itself in ameliorative terms by promoting qualitative alongside quantitative styles of inquiry, by focusing on embodied experience and affect instead of exclusively on cognition and behavior, and by theorizing and rendering knowable the self as a relational, distributed, discursive achievement rather than a stable, transcendental entity, reinforces psychology's entanglement with a capitalism increasingly invested in the local, the affective and the commodification and remaking of identities, experiences and lifestyles. Critical psychology, as an upgraded psychology, in this manner

often contributes to the shaping of neoliberal subjectivities and cultures under capitalism rather than to its critique and undoing: "the 'critical' take on mainstream psychology brings the discipline closer to the requirements of contemporary capitalism" (Parker, 1999a, p. 85).

It is here that Marxism re-enters the scene to play an important, perhaps even necessary role in the critical refusal of psychology. Rather than merely an established theoretical tradition in the institutionalized social sciences and even psychology (see the next section below), Marxism as a still open frontier of political invention and modes of collectivization and revolutionary action, as a living and growing source of social movement oriented theory and practice, never fully captured by the insular interests of academic disciplines and the academic careers they support, forces even *critical* psychology to own up to its entanglement in the political economy of psychology and the university, and to how it profits from a deeply psychologized contemporary capitalism. Parker (1999a) goes as far as stating that Marxism – and he specifies a revolutionary Marxism – is the *only* theoretical resource "left that can tackle the problem and reassert once again a properly radical stance toward academic, professional and cultural aspects of the discipline" (pp. 86-87). Some readers may feel that Parker is guilty here of hyperbole, or that he neglects to take into account that Marxism itself is not immune to recuperation in many different ways, including even facile forms of academic identity politics, the radical chic of an insular campus politics – however, even such readers would be hard pressed to suggest a theoretical and political resource more suitable, especially when engaged and developed in dialogue with many other critical traditions, as is displayed so richly in the articles in this edition, to interrogate psychology's entanglement with capitalism, and to extricate from it a truly critical approach to subjectivity and the difficulties we face as individuals and collectives in this world. Marxism, accordingly, functions for us in a manner similar to the role attributed to it in relation to philosophy by Balibar (1993), namely Marxism "not as a philosophy, but as an alternative to philosophy, a *non-philosophy* or even an *anti-philosophy*" (p. 2, emphases in the original).

Significantly, Balibar does not therefore attribute to Marx an *abandonment* of philosophy; Marx does not leave philosophy to remain itself while he departs for political economy. Instead, his refusal shifts the very coordinates of philosophy: Balibar (1993) writes, once again in relation to philosophy, that "*after Marx, philosophy is no longer as it was before*. An irreversible event has occurred, one which

is not comparable with the emergence of a new philosophical point of view, because it not only obliges us to change our ideas or methods, but to transform the practice of philosophy” (p. 4, emphasis in original). This too captures for us the role we want Marxism to play in relation to psychology. Marxism in psychology, or the effect of a Marxist refusal of psychology, is neither merely an abandonment of psychology as an academic enterprise, nor solely concerned with the reconstruction of a “better” psychology in its place. Marxism in psychology is rather a vector along which psychology is forced to become worldly: to be challenged, disrupted, detoured, forced beyond itself, occupied, deprovincialized, decolonized – from the perspective of subjects in struggle and in relation to their timely desire for change, not as effect of the unilateral implementation of a scholarly tradition. This is perhaps nowhere better illustrated than in the planning, celebration and after-effects of the Second Congress of Marxism and Psychology itself, and we spend some time towards the end of this article to discuss this event. For now it is useful to be reminded of Parker’s (1999a) claim, that “critical psychology will mean nothing at all if it is not a space for us to find alternative forms of collective practice” (p. 80). This is precisely what was achieved in and around the Congress, namely the opening up of a clearing beyond the sedimentation of an academic tradition and a canonical body of texts, for a confrontation in psychology with local struggles and the formation of collective practices in ways which not only baffles dominant forms of psychology, but continues to expose that psychology, in the immediacy of insurgent experience, for its betrayal of that experience and for the role it plays in the very forces of alienation that produces the (societal) “need” for psychologized interventions in the first place.

It is clear even from a cursory perusal of the papers included in this edition of the Annual Review that there is no single “Marxist psychology”, nor even competing paradigms of “Marxist psychology”. In fact, the development of such a psychology is not even on the agenda. The contributions all display what Williams (2013), in a recent volume about Marxism in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, describes as a Marxism that is “not dogmatic or descriptive” but “is open, searching, dialectical, humanist, utopian and inspirational” (p. 3). Marxism is brought into dialogue with a range of other critical traditions, and brought to bear on many different political struggles. However, all these interventions occur against the background of a long history of Marxist refusals and revolutions in psychology, and it is to a brief survey of this history that we now turn.

## **A Panoramic View of the Relationship between Marxism and Psychology**

Any effort to trace back the origins of the relationship between Marxism and psychology has to begin by going back to the works of Karl Marx himself, in order to examine his conception of the psyche as, in essence, social, founded upon concrete activity and the material conditions of life, inseparable from cultural and ideological factors, cloven and, at times, torn asunder by sociopolitical conflicts, and determined by the unfolding of history and economic forces and relations. This conception of the psyche is revealed in the work of the young Marx through his analysis of the dehumanizing and alienating aspects of capitalism: how human beings come to be subordinated to money and commodities; how bonds among people are reduced to relations among things; the visible deployment of psychology in industry; the idealist substrate of madness, and the multiple divisions that separate the existence of individuals from their essence, their labor from its products, and society from the State (Marx, 1843, 1844; Marx and Engels, 1845). Later, the mature Marx would complete, rectify and deepen these ideas by elucidating, *inter alia*, commodity fetishism; the determination of consciousness by existence; the production rather than simply the satisfaction of needs; personality as the personification of economic categories; the acquisition of will and consciousness of capital through the capitalist; the imbrication of material and spiritual power; the instinct to accumulate as an intrinsic tendency of capital that leads to its growth, and the sedimentation of past experience in present states of mind (Marx, 1852, 1858, 1859, 1866, 1867; Marx and Engels, 1846, 1848).

Many of Marx’s followers developed an interest in issues related to psychology, though the earliest Marxist psychology was not developed by academic or professional psychologists but, rather, by the great thinkers and political leaders of Marxism. Engels’ research, for example, is clearly of a psychological nature, not only in its explanation of the role of work in generating human consciousness (Engels, 1876), but also in its probing into the sexual-familial and patriarchal background of private property and the modern State (1884). Plekhanov (1907) was concerned with the psychological mediations between the economic base and the ideological superstructure. Lenin (1902), in turn, preferred to focus on such topics as class consciousness and the psychological aspect of interactions between the masses and the vanguard, while Lukács (1923) turned to psychology to help explain his

conception of human practice as a concrete synthesis of reality and thought.

Marxist psychologists, in the strict sense of the term, first emerged in Russia after the 1917 Revolution. The first paradigm of Soviet psychology was embodied in the *reflexology* of Pavlov and Sechenov. By rooting all psychological processes in physiological reflexes it enabled the objective experimental research championed by Vladimir Bekhterev (1925) and conceived as the only form capable of satisfying the epistemological and methodological exigencies of the Marxist materialist approach. Shortly afterwards, and as a result of his questioning of reflexology, Konstantin Kornilov (1930) developed his theory of *reactology*, which sought to overcome philosophical subjectivism and reflexological objectivism by centering psychological research on individual reactions understood as disequilibria and exchanges between the internal subjective world and the external objective world. Here the psyche no longer resides as an interior in which the exterior is passively reflected, but has been shifted to the reactive relation between interiority and exteriority.

This same interest in the relation between the interior and the exterior appears in the work of Lev Vygotsky (1931). In his paradigmatic *sociocultural* or *historical-cultural* proposal, Vygotsky explains intrapersonal psychological processes as an interiorization of interpersonal processes in which both cultural and historical factors intervene. For Vygotsky, this interiorization, mediated by language and other instruments of culture, determines individual development, which can thus be conceived as a cultural construction realized through social interactions in shared activities. Vygotsky, therefore, offers an *interactive-social* explanation of the psyche that is clearly distinguishable from Kornilov's *reactive-individual* description and Bekhterev's *passive-reflexive* approach.

Among the circle of Vygotsky's itinerant collaborators and followers in Moscow, Leningrad and Kharkov, two stand out. The first was Alexander Luria (1925), a pioneer not only in contemporary neuropsychology, but also in Freudo-Marxism. The second was Alexei Leontiev (1978), who represented human activity as a complex, socially-situated phenomenon whose meaning is reflected in mental activity. Leontiev's distinction of three levels of psychological processes is well known: the highest and most complex level of activity and its motivations, the intermediate level of actions and their goals, and the most basic, elemental level, of operations that serve as means to achieve higher-order objectives.

But it is important to recall as well other followers of Vygotsky and their contributions: Bluma Zeigarnik (1938), who gave a name to the effect through which one remembers better that which is interrupted; Alexandr Zaporozhets (1965), who studied the active character of perception, rejected the acceleration of learning and proposed instead an amplification of the capacities characteristic of each age; Lidia Bozhovich (1976), who probed deeply into the internal and sociocultural determinants of personality; Piotr Galperin (1979), who defined the object of psychology as orienting mental activity that is an effect of interiorization and that originates in practical material activity; Daniil Elkonin (1980), who studied the importance of infant play in development and in the origin of social roles, and Piotr Zinchenko (1983), who demonstrated how involuntary memory is determined by action and motivation. In recent decades, aside from the Vygotskians who worked in the Soviet Union, there were many others in the Western world, some of whom openly adopted Marxist positions. Fred Newman and Lois Holzman (1993), Andy Blunden (2010) and Carl Ratner (2011), among others, come to mind. These Vygotskians, like their predecessors in the Soviet Union, tend to manifest a Marxist influence, with greater or lesser degrees of fidelity to dialectical materialism and the amount of attention they give society, activity, and historical and cultural factors. Their decisive contributions to psychology are likewise contributions of Marxism.

In Soviet Marxist psychology, developing parallel to the Vygotskian tradition, we find the emergence of another school, one that originated with Sergei Rubinstein and his theory of activity. Rubinstein (1940) set out from the principle of the unity – not identity – of consciousness and activity, which holds that activity is a social phenomenon through which consciousness and the psychological are not only formed but actually expressed. Thus, in contrast to Leontiev's view, they must be studied in their own right and not be assimilated to activity or its reflection. Consciousness does not cease to reflect activity, but regulates and, therefore, determines it. Among Rubinstein's principal disciples we could mention Elena Budilova, Ksenia Abuljanova, Ekaterina Shorojova, Boris Lomov and Andrey Brushlinski.

While Marxist psychology was imposed on and came to predominate in the Soviet Union and other socialist-block countries, it also succeeded in penetrating and establishing a solid foothold in academic circles in the Western capitalist world. From the 1920s to the 1960s, France witnessed the emergence of influential psychologists that explicitly defended their Marxist postures and offered valuable critiques

of other theoretical-psychological options. First among them was Georges Politzer (1927), who in addition to questioning the abstractionism and animism of psychoanalysis and of the different schools of psychology of his time, proposed a *concrete psychology* that would be truly materialist: one that would focus on the dramatic events of human life instead of replacing it with abstractions like the mental processes of classical psychology or the psychic instances of Freudian metapsychology. By criticizing all forms of mechanistic and organicist approaches, Henri Wallon (1941) developed an infant psychology inspired in Marxist-Hegelian thought which analyzed the dialectical synthesis of biological-natural and historical-social factors, and highlighted ruptures over the continuities and transitions on which Piaget insisted. Wallon also accepted the possibility of regressive processes, not only progressive ones, and investigated the original and fundamental role of emotions rather than focusing solely on interactions, as emphasized in Vygotsky's work. Finally, in the late 1960s, Lucien Sève (1969) advanced Politzer's work by reconstructing a Marxist theory of personality that aspired to be materialist, but without collapsing into biologism; an approach that recognized an intimate imbrication of individual personality and social behavior, that accentuated historical determinism, and that questioned any supposed atemporal, universal human essence, as defended by diverse forms of humanism.

While these Marxist psychological theories were being developed in France and the USSR, German-speaking countries saw the emergence of proposals to fuse or articulate Marxist theoretical approaches with the Freudian psychoanalytical perspective, which, from the outset, tended to disassociate itself from mainstream psychology. Psychoanalysis seeks to go beyond the grand themes of Marxist psychology, including consciousness and activity, and enter a field of inapprehensible objects, such as the unconscious and the drives, which in diverse Marxist-Freudian orientations are reconsidered in light of capitalist exploitation. Wilhelm Reich (1929), the most famous representative of Freudo-Marxism, attempted to overcome the alleged bourgeois limitations of Freud by postulating that class domination entails also sexual repression and neurotic disorders. Another important Freudo-Marxist author of that era, Otto Fenichel (1934), well known for his role as a protagonist in the secret letters [*Rundbriefe*] that circulated among Marxist psychoanalysts around the world, came to understand Marxism and psychoanalysis as sciences that unmask the true causes concealed behind pretexts. Indeed, he proposed Freudian theory as the nucleus of a future dialectical-materialist psychology

while defending the interesting hypothesis that the material base is transformed into superstructure in human psychism. Also deserving of mention here are the Marxist and Freudian philosophers of the Frankfurt School, especially Herbert Marcuse (1953), who vindicated the pleasure principle, questioned an alienating *performance principle* distinct from the reality principle, and denounced – beyond a certain necessary repression – a *surplus repression* for consumption and yield, for exploitation and capitalist accumulation.

In this same Austro-German tradition of Marxist psychoanalysis, two original thinkers who settled in Latin America and had a decisive influence on the diffusion of Marxism in Freudian circles in this part of the world, stand out. The first is Erich Fromm (1955), who resided in Mexico from 1949 to 1974, where he promoted a humanist reading of Marx and a culturalist interpretation of psychoanalysis, which led to a conflict with the Frankfurt School where he began his intellectual career. Marie Langer (1971), an Austrian, lived first in Argentina before moving to Mexico and, later, Nicaragua. She chose not to renounce the revolutionary struggle in favor of psychoanalytical practice, though this meant a break with the International Psychoanalytical Association and led to her becoming involved in some of the most interesting Marxist experiences in Latin American psychology and psychoanalysis in the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, including the collective *Plataforma* and the *Coordinadora de Trabajadores de Salud Mental* in Argentina, the Mexico-Nicaragua Mental Health Initiative, and the Encounters of Marxist Psychoanalysis and Psychology in Cuba.

From the 1970s to the 1990s, while efforts to articulate Marxism and psychoanalysis continued in Germany, the Free University of Berlin gave birth to an important Marxist current of critical psychology. One of its founders and principal representatives, Klaus Holzkamp (1985, 1991), questioned mainstream psychology and how it served the interests of the power elite by refusing to consider the perspective of the subject, by abstracting the world, and by accepting the context as something fixed and unchangeable, that is, as an independent variable or given condition, thus effectively eliminating mankind's capacity to transform vital circumstances. Holzkamp (1988, 1996) took up notions from Marx and various Marxist authors, principally Leontiev, and eventually proposed a psychology from the perspective of subjects situated in the world that centered on the subjective reasons for action and how this is understood socially. Holzkamp's vision took center stage in development of and debates within this Marxist current of

critical psychology, to which, in addition to Holzkamp, such figures as Ute Osterkamp, Morus Markard, Frigga Haug and Ole Dreier would also contribute.

In a current distinct from Holzkamp and German critical psychology, the British critical psychologist Ian Parker (2007) places himself more or less discretely in the Marxist camp by questioning the political and ideological complicities of mainstream psychology. His complex and multifaceted critique reveals itself as being anti-capitalist, anti-racist, anti-colonialist, and anti-sexist, while recurring to ideas, concepts and arguments from Marx, Trotsky, Žižek and diverse Marxist authors, whilst also utilizing discourse analysis, Freudian and Lacanian psychoanalysis, contemporary feminism, and the post-structuralist thought of Derrida and Foucault. In the intersections of his multiple theoretical and political references, Parker's critical psychology (1999b) promotes a Marxist analysis of commoditization, alienation, and individualization, while positing the fundamental incompatibility of Marxism and psychology, which results in his commitment to Marxist revolutionary practice instead of creating a Marxist psychological theory which, he holds, would be as impossible as it would be undesirable (1999c). Like psychoanalysis, Marxism serves Parker by allowing him to effect a critical and reflexive distancing from the discipline of psychology. Such a procedure, which can also be detected in the work of other English-speaking scholars (e.g. Kovel, 1988; Hayes, 2001), has antecedents in the Frankfurt School (Adorno, 1949) and the elaborate critiques of psychology by Latin American Marxist psychoanalysis (Sastre, 1974; Braunstein et al., 1975).

In the Latin American context, Marxism has also long served as a platform from which to criticize psychoanalysis, as, for example, in the work of Bleger (1958), who takes up and reformulates some of Politzer's categories; and that of Revueltas (1950) and Carrión (1970), who reject the utilization of Freudian categories to essentialize national characters. This second critical application of Marxism, the history of which can be traced back to Voloshinov (1927) and other Soviet authors, has co-existed in Latin America with the aforementioned Marxist-Freudian critiques of the psychological discipline, and with critical approaches to psychology and/or psychoanalysis which ended up producing positive, alternative theoretical constructions. This is the case, for example, of Merani's – a follower of Wallon – dialectical psychology (1968), and the conceptions of

subjectivity and personality found in the work of Fernando González-Rey (2002), who trained in the Soviet School.

### Conference and Convulsion: Looking Back and Looking Ahead

The Second International Congress of Marxism and Psychology was held from 9-11 August 2012. No more appropriate term occurs to us to describe the events that transpired there than *convulsive*. And it seems even more suitable when we consider its nexus with associated terms such as *subversion* and *revolution*, all of which are salient to historical, political and economic analyses of social transformations, and which we simultaneously link to the events that occurred in Michoacán and Mexico before, during and after the Congress. Convulsed was the organization, convulsed its effectuation, and convulsed have been its repercussions; but convulsive, above all, is the social reality that surrounded the Congress. To some degree, the organizers anticipated this, as we were well aware of the diligent labor that organizing such an event would entail, foresaw that its production promised to be both problematic and stimulating, and expected that it would be a genuine landmark, indeed a watershed for the intellectual, academic and social institutions and actors interested in taking part, not only in Morelia, but throughout Michoacán and the country as a whole; and not just in the field of critical psychology or Marxism, but in a much broader intellectual and practical milieu. However, our expectations came nowhere close to approaching what actually, and finally, occurred as each moment came, as even the most radical predictions fell far short of reality. And, of course, no one could have imagined what was about to transpire, in the months after the Congress, in the state and across the country.

In a broad ranging report on the Congress, "Psychology and Marxism in Mexico", Ian Parker (2012) situated, with superb accuracy, its celebration in the context of the entire complex of social phenomena occurring at the time in Michoacán and Mexico. Clearly it is not possible to reflect on this intensely collective event from a perspective that disregards all the things that were going on at the time on a broader social plane, for these determined several of the key characteristics of the Congress. And today, at almost three years' distance, we intend to do just that, *but* taking into account everything that has transpired during this interval.

According to some witnesses, the celebration of such a Congress was rather inopportune. Voices were

heard to say that its focus was “obsolescent” or “out of touch” with the times in which we were living. In fact, during the preparatory phase and even in the opening speech itself we heard claims that “Marxism itself had expired” together with “Marxism’s nexus to psychology”. But in reality everything that happened during and after the Congress would reveal the falsity of such assertions.

As organizers, we sought to subvert the usual formats of international academic congresses, beginning with our preparatory work, though this entailed enormous efforts: organization was handled by a collective of professors and students at the Faculty of Psychology of the Universidad Michoacana de San Nicolás de Hidalgo, all of whom worked diligently despite the conditions of austerity and limited resources, striving throughout to guard against academic and institutional inertias influencing the event. For example, we made virtually all the papers, plenary sessions and conferences available to the vast majority of attendees through consecutive translation, instead of presenting them only in English, since virtually the entire audience was made up of Spanish-speakers. And before the event, we edited a bilingual information booklet. Though familiarity with English varied greatly among attendees, there was a common denominator: due to cultural factors, a lack of familiarity with that language was generalized. Unfortunately, and despite our best efforts to *not* make this a totally academic event, certain “academicist” inertias were activated by unexpected occurrences, such as impatience caused by deficiencies in the translation process.

Representatives of the indigenous municipality of Cherán played a prominent role at the Congress, especially in the organization phase and at the opening and closing ceremonies. Their presence was an attempt to give greater visibility to their struggle, a case of local resistance to capitalism and its nefarious effects on the poorest sectors of society. As Parker (2012) perceptively points out, their participation caused a great deal of discomfort among the university’s authorities and the emissaries sent by the state government, at a time when tensions already forebode the unleashing of repressive violence against indigenous people who had risen up in resistance. In 2011, people in Cherán, an prominent Purépecha municipality in Michoacán, had decided to establish an *autonomous municipality* that they would govern on the basis of their “uses and customs”, thus rejecting the violence that was ravaging the town (leading up to their declaration of autonomy, the homicide rate there had reached one per week, in a population of only about 16,000, and residents had repeatedly been stripped of

their land, had their cattle stolen, and had witnessed illegal timber-cutting in its forests, while the women were frequent victims of unspeakable abuses at the hands of organized crime) and conventional forms of government and, along with these, a political class in collusion with criminals and deeply immersed in corruption. In a first act, the representatives of all levels of government were expelled from the municipality, followed quickly by the dissolution of all political parties and the police force. In their place a new, community-based organization was instituted, controlled by the community through a “council of government”. Today, almost three years after the Congress, which coincided with some of the tensest and most menacing moments of the crisis that Cherán’s inhabitants faced, we can appreciate how radically things have changed since that declaration of autonomy, as the diffuse expectations posited during discussions at the Congress took on ever-clearer forms.

According to information provided by residents, to date there have been no reports of crimes (robberies, brawls, murders), a situation that contrasts starkly with the circumstances that reign in the rest of Michoacán and Mexico. Safety has improved so greatly that indigenous peoples from other regions of the state have sought, and found, sanctuary in Cherán; refugees from the rampant insecurity in Michoacán, where murders, assaults, kidnappings, extortions, usurpations, and rapes are the order of the day and enjoy the active complicity of the different orders of government and formally-organized security forces. After receiving the Suprema Court’s “authorization” in 2014 to elect its authorities according to “uses and customs”, Cherán’s residents expressed their wish earlier this year to maintain this form of community organization, and therefore did not allow voting stations to be set up in their region for the coming state and federal elections. This is, of course, but one reflection of their deep mistrust of all government authorities who have failed, thus far, to satisfy the people’s three basic demands: restitution of Cherán’s illegally-exploited forests; clearing up of cases of deaths and disappearances; and guarantees of public security.

The example of Cherán not only preceded the emergence of other self-defense movements throughout Michoacán, but in fact seems to have inspired them during the years immediately following the celebration of the Congress. This was largely a response to the security crisis attributed to the collusion among organized crime, the private business sector, and all levels of government. Of diverse origins from the outset – not all involved indigenous peoples as in Cherán, and some were supported by the government

itself, others by drug-trafficking mafias with economic interests, and still others by groups that took up arms in authentic reactions to the public security crisis, the rampant poverty, and the corruption that are ravaging the state – these self-defense movements have experienced very different destinies during the last three years. After a grand heyday and statewide proliferation, they have recently entered a landscape marked by uncertainty. A few, coincidentally those formed by indigenous peoples, are still active, while others have been coopted by government or have given rise to new mafias that replaced previously dominant cartels. Today, more than 100 members of these self-defense movements are in prison, including their principal leaders.

In summary, we must recognize that none of this necessarily bears any direct relation to the Congress, but clearly it is important to point out the coincidence of the timing of that event with the emergence of distinct struggles and resistance movements in the state and the country that constitute an integral part of a generalized awakening of consciences that, without doubt, had long been apathetic and dormant. There is no question that these events re-oriented some of the lines of discussion, involving many of the Congress' attendees, concerning the most pertinent kinds of research and political action within, and beyond, psychology. However, there are even clearer relations to be discerned between what happened during the Congress and the immediate future of those who participated in it.

Clearly, as Parker (2012) observes, many of the organizers, and a good number of attendees (around 700 people) were students; at least a few of them were activists or militants of distinct ideologies (Marxists of different ilk, anarchists, etc.), while others – the majority – were only beginning to wet their feet in the knowledge bases and practices of distinct critical perspectives in the discipline of psychology and beyond its borders. Among the latter were members of the student group #YoSoy132, launched in 2012 by a large group of students at Mexico's Iberoamericana University in denunciation of then presidential candidate – now President of Mexico – Enrique Peña Nieto and his and his party's (the PRI) dismissal of their protest. That movement proliferated with astounding speed and expanded to include students from around the country. Michoacán was no exception. A large contingent of students from several universities, especially the Universidad Michoacana de San Nicolás de Hidalgo, with a strong nucleus established in the Faculty of Psychology, consolidated an organized and very active local protest movement that fought to resist what it perceived as a corrupt candidature, one

void of content and stained by collusion with the most nefarious interests. Later, that same movement would seek to impugn a presidential election widely considered fraudulent due to innumerable irregularities. One especially interesting aspect is that, as at other moments in the history of social movements in Mexico and the world, students were at the forefront, organizing and leading the struggle, while other sectors – university professors, for example, including some of the Congress' organizers – stood side-by-side with them as equals in a common front that still exists today.

In addition, the Congress posed a challenge to some of the biases and hardline ideological nuclei of its organizers. As Parker (2012) notes in his review, the final session of the event turned into something of a carnival or, more precisely, escaped completely from the control of its organizers. The members of the #YoSoy132 movement, which was showing some signs of decline at the time, participated in an exceptional manner at the main plenary session that ended the Congress, where they occupied the seats previously assigned to a series of special guests, who ceded their chairs to these young people. But that was not the only unexpected and unplanned event to alter the program and turn things chaotic and carnivalesque, for it was soon followed by the abrupt entrance of a woman who was not part of the organizing group, an invitee, a speaker, or even registered as an attendee, but who vociferously began to shout claims, demands and grievances. And just like that she was incorporated into the plenary session, beside the #YoSoy132 students, in the very center of the panel discussion, accentuating the surreal nature of the scene. Despite the critical, militant and open orientation of the organizers, that savage interruption of insanity into reality, we must admit, filled us with misgivings, unease and discomfort, for it forcefully uncovered the never-questioned ideological bases behind our habitual educational, political and academic practices.

Today, two and a half years after the Congress, the students of #YoSoy132 have spawned other groups based on this experience and have been demonstrating increasingly radical tendencies. This has largely dissipated our doubts and fears that the Congress might have constituted merely the final agonizing throes of an incipient and perhaps frustrated awakening of consciences. Despite their divergent ideologies (some identified with classic Marxism-Leninism, others with diverse forms of anarchism, or social, communitarian, libertarian or critical psychology, still others with diverse forms of feminism, etc.), many students at the Faculty of Psychology have led valuable struggles to defend free education, to protest



against the generalized violence that target women, and to show solidarity in reaction to the recent murder and disappearance of nearly 50 students from the Rural Normal School Raúl Isidro Burgos in Ayotzinapa, Guerrero, presumably at the hands of organized crime in a conspiracy that involved police forces and levels of government.

Also, these students, together with new and increasingly politicized generations, have proceeded to organize assemblies of representatives at the Faculty of Psychology and other schools and faculties at the Universidad Michoacana that give a voice to students and that, thanks to their authentically democratic and rebellious character and stubborn resolve to resist co-optation, and thus emerging as a permanent focus of discussion and debate, of accusations, and of alternative proposals to dominant policies, have become a true pebble in the shoes of university authorities. Their most recent success, achieved only after a long, hard fight, was to oblige the university's current authorities to respect the right to free higher education. Meanwhile, the woman who intruded, interrupted and, rather uncomfortably, joined the final session of the Congress was not heard from again until just a few months ago, when one of us saw her once again abruptly burst into the offices of a political party to challenge, in acts and words, the institutional order that few dare to question.

While analyzing these political incidents we cannot lose sight of the Congress' obvious effects on the way in which the surrounding community conceives of psychology. More than ever before, in professors' research projects, students' theses, papers, academic forums, publications, roundtables, social networks, and even everyday co-existence, psychology is being questioned by its own practitioners, students and professors, due to its openly ideological and disciplinary character; criticisms based on concrete cases of daily events in the country. The discovery of flagrant cases of corruption and conflicts of interest that reach up to the President of Mexico himself, a prostrate economy that shows no growth, alarming rates of poverty and unemployment, and the aforementioned insecurity that extends nationwide, have triggered an ideological response based in part on the knowledge and techniques of the predominant, hegemonic forms of psychology. In addition to returning to means of overt and covert repression, powerful groups in Mexico had as never before – or, at least, never with such vehemence and insolence in discourse and practice – turned to hegemonic psychology and the knowledge of the psychological discipline (that is, to psychology as a discipline, as a disciplinary form) in an attempt to demobilize an angered, protesting citizenry in ways

that have explicitly laid bare psychology's commitment to the capitalist system and the ideological role that it plays within it: from the construction of categories of pathology that affect those who demonstrate and protest to the proliferation of discourses that seek to discourage people and wipe away memories of multitudinous aggressions, murders and disappearances (e.g., "we must better ourselves as individuals"; "each one must contribute her/his grain of sand"; "change is inside us"; "instead of protesting we should get to work"; "we must get over the trauma"; "think ahead"; "think positively"; "a group of misfits does not represent the voice of all Mexicans", etc.).

But at the same time, also as never before experienced in Mexico, and close to us in Michoacán, there arose a broad, indeed overwhelming, dismissal of these psychological apparatuses and discourses. They are viewed with unprecedented suspicion, one that recognizes the role of a psychology generally committed to the worst; as if at this time of profound crisis the dialectical tension among the parties in conflict made it possible to heighten the ideological and normative character of psychology and thus, simultaneously, reveal its true face. In all of this the psychologists (students and teachers alike) who participated in the Congress have played a fundamental role. In that dead-end alley which prior to 2012 offered only the alternatives of hegemonic academic psychology and "pop" psychology, psychologists in Michoacán seem to be leaning more and more strongly towards diverse forms of critical psychology whose common denominator is that it is always in tension, in a relationship of refusal, with other psychologies and with a social reality in which all these actors and phenomena occur.

In effect, just as Parker (2012) reminds us, for Marx human essence is not individualizable, but must be understood as "the ensemble of social relations". The Second International Congress of Marxism and Psychology, through a series of acts that spanned its preparation, realization and aftereffects that we are still feeling today, demonstrates this with clarity and force: it was, and still is, a collective event, one made possible by the organized work of many, situated in a specific, problematic and conflictual social, economic, political and intellectual context; but one that, fortunately, has had consequences which we believe are revolutionary in this field of social relations. A Congress, in other words, that turned out to be more revolutionary than had been anticipated; and a revolution that becomes visible for those of us who remain in Mexico, in Michoacán, in Morelia, in the transformation of many attendees, of their ideologies, of their

practices, and of their forms of collective organization. Though almost three years have passed, we still cannot visualize the definitive scope of this subversion of thought and practice, it has most assuredly not been something minor. And today, in the texts included in this issue of the Annual Review of Critical Psychology, our aim is to offer others a glimpse of that revolutionary event, confident that the unforeseen effects in those who read them will completely surpass the expectations we hold as we consolidate these texts for publication.

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