

Lawrence R. Alschuler



The Psychopolitics of Liberation

Political Consciousness
from a Jungian
Perspective



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To: "Traditions for Tomorrow," a Geneva-based international network of nonprofit associations that accompanies the efforts of indigenous peoples in Latin America seeking to safeguard their cultural identity. Its work is in harmony with the conclusions of this book.

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Foreword

Lawrence Alschuler has achieved what had been thought to be virtually impossible. From an academic base as a political scientist, he has understood, digested, and then applied ideas from depth psychology to the “treatment” of pressing social and political issues of our time. He has done this in a way that I—and, no doubt, other analysts—find to be without violence to the concepts that underpin our daily clinical work. He “gets it,” and then some. In fact, I would go so far as to say that Jung in Alschuler’s hands is a Jung that the contemporary academy would be happier to engage with than is presently the case. And analysts such as myself can learn from some of the reworkings of central ideas of analytical psychology as found in this book.

Then, as one who has intensively studied Jungian psychology in Zurich, he has paid attention to the pitfalls of taking a psychological tack with respect to political issues. Mainly, these include a tendency to Olympian judgments and a sort of psychological triumphalism in which all problematics are reduced to their psychology.

So, almost alone, Alschuler has established in the concrete form of a book something that, for most of us who work the psychology-politics field, has been a goal, and perhaps even an ideal fiction. The two-way street between politics and depth psychology that I felt almost impossible to achieve when I wrote *The Political Psyche* in 1993 is here before my eyes. The hybrid language I was struggling to write is here beyond its pidgin phase.

What follows is by no means written in collusion with the author who may balk at the way I have read his text. Nevertheless, it is surely the job of the one who writes a Foreword to whet the appetite by showing the impact the work has had on him and not let his piece degenerate into a testimonial.

I want to underscore the way Alschuler proceeds when he makes his moves from oppressed consciousness to liberated consciousness. He is clearly interested in the obstacles that prevent the flowering of the liberated state. That is

to say, he regards liberated consciousness as what one might call the default potential. This is what humanity aspires to and is capable of achieving. But then it all goes wrong and the potential stays a potential. This is, in a way, a clinical approach to the matter because, in analysis, what the analyst does is to work with all the negative and destructive stuff that prevents a flowering of the patient's potentials. It is assumed that everyone has a potential to individuate, meaning to be in felt harmony with oneself, and, as we have learned to point out, in a good-enough relation to society. It is also assumed by Jungian analysts that the unconscious is not only the source of conflicts and destructive tendencies—it is also, as Jung argued *contra* Freud, the place where those positive and benevolent movements of the soul are first encountered.

All this leaves Alschuler in a fascinating place. His task is to understand how the social conditions of oppression so damage the creative potential of the unconscious for liberation that the latter never comes on stream. In this respect he is in a very similar place, though using different language and concepts, to those psychoanalysts who seek to understand the operations of the normative social unconscious—what a subject (a person) takes in from inhabiting a particular social order with its particular sets of social relations.

Of course, here we are up against distortions of Jung that would leave out his recognition of the importance of the personal unconscious alongside the better-known idea he developed of the collective unconscious. These days, I think many analysts regard the hard and fast distinction between personal and collective unconscious as rather old-fashioned—how could there be one without the other? But, for the most part, what is collective is regarded as the psychological analogue of *things biological*, as mental representations of the drives and of the body generally. Alschuler encourages us to see that the collective unconscious may also be regarded as the psychological analogue of *things social*, as the place where certain kinds of cultural experience find their crystallized resting place.

Alschuler makes an explicit comparison between his work and the approaches taken by liberation theology. I think this is apt but we can learn a thing or two from the history of liberation theology that will be relevant to the psychopolitics of liberation. We can take it as a given that the powerful will not appreciate such projects, but there is more to say. There is a necessary stretching of the original animal (theology, psychology) to embrace the goal of liberation. How far can these entities stretch? How much hybridization can they take before something essential is lost? At what point does the radical priest cease to be a priest and become a politician? At what point does the radical analyst cease to be an analyst and become an activist? And who decides?

Anyone familiar with debates about politically motivated art and literature will be aware of what is at stake here. In the arts, we hope to find undoubted

genius or at least talent and certainly some aesthetic appeal alongside the political commitments. If we don't then we will relegate the work to the category of agitational propaganda and not art. Many approaches to Bertolt Brecht stress his lyricism alongside his politics, so he can safely be regarded as an artist. When it comes to Augusto Boal, sometimes the general verdict tips the other way. But, as I say, you have to check out the desire of the critic who may well want to drive a certain kind of artist from the canon, just as the hierarchy of the Roman Catholic Church drove out Leonardo Boff.

So far, I have acknowledged Alschuler's extraordinary achievement in opening the crucial two-way street between depth psychology and politics, suggested that his is a clinical model without claiming to be so, appreciated the reworking of what we might understand by collective, and worried away at the category definitions that surround what he is trying to do. In the remainder of the Foreword, I want to look in a bit more detail at his method and suggest a meaning to the project that may not have been in the mind of its creator.

In his analysis of the testimonies and stories of the four indigenous activists whose material forms a central section of the book, Alschuler is using what psychoanalysis calls the "case history" method. We can learn things that will apply to others in the same situation by examining how certain ideas illuminate the material of one particular person. It is how Freud, in particular promoted psychoanalysis and there are many today who will claim that, viewed generously, this is indeed a scientific methodology.

If this naming of the method as case history is correct, then one can make sense of the brilliant and innovative transitions throughout the book from the work done on the narratives of the four exemplars to a series of public policy proposals. These proposals, in themselves, are highly innovative in that they deploy language (such as "ancestral soul") not exactly familiar in the corridors of power. I hope Alschuler has done enough to make his diet palatable to administrators and politicians. I have my doubts about this and would just want to interpolate that, before mocking such language and the perspectives it brings with it, today's administrators and politicians should ask themselves whether they have done all that well with all the power and resources at their proposal to create a decent and just world. Their mockery begs our question . . .

This swipe at contemporary politicians sets the scene for my concluding observation. I want to draw a parallel between Jung's engagement with the East and Alschuler's work on these four individuals. What seems like a study of the Other turns out to be a secret and codified study of the self. Alschuler has unwittingly diagnosed something of the greatest importance about Western politics from his deep connection to Third World and indigenous

issues. For the problem with multicultural postmodern (or late modern) societies is that they lack the energetic authenticity to feed the soul needs of their citizens, even (and, I think, often) those who belong to majority communities. Please note that I am not talking about how the majority benefits from a vibrant array of minority ethnic groups. I am referring to something that extends the insight of Fanon: the soul of the colonialist gets damaged, albeit in different ways, just as the soul of the colonial subject gets damaged. In today's Western-style societies, all the injustices that flourish with respect to the Others in their midst perform a terrible distorting violence on the souls of the powerful majority as well. Alschuler's book is all about this particular tension of opposites. As such, it has a very wide range of healing potentials within it.

Andrew Samuels
Professor of Analytical Psychology, University of
Essex. Author of *The Political Psyche* and
Politics on the Couch: Citizenship and the Internal Life.

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To the Faculty of Social Sciences at the University of Ottawa, Canada, I am thankful for supporting the research for this book by approving my many sabbatical research leaves and study leaves to attend the C. G. Jung Institute of Zurich, Switzerland. I am grateful to the C. G. Jung Institute of Zurich, where I studied during the 1980s.

Finally, I thank my wife, Freda, for her loving patience and support throughout.

Introduction

What Questions Are Addressed to Oppression and Liberation?

After studying the political economy of the Third World for many years in order to understand development and revolution, two groups of questions persisted and became the instigation for this book.¹

1. *On Oppression: Why Is Oppression so Stable? Why Do the Oppressed Not Revolt More Often?* In answer to these questions, political studies of revolution identify certain causes, such as the domination of elites over the masses, the ineffectiveness of revolutionary leadership, the influence of transnational actors, and the lack of appealing ideologies of change.² These explanations, in emphasizing objective sociopolitical conditions, tend to neglect the depth-psychological conditions of the oppressed. My research probes the psychological conditions and provides answers in terms of “oppressed consciousness.”³

2. *On Liberation: Why Do Some Oppressed People, Rather than Others, Succeed in Liberating Themselves? Why Do Some Oppressed People Become Leaders of Liberation Struggles?* Political studies of revolution often search for answers in the biographies of revolutionary leaders and the ideologies they espouse. Once more, the usual explanations tend to neglect the depth-psychological conditions of the oppressed, something that my research emphasizes and analyzes in terms of “liberated consciousness.”

In attempting to answer these questions on oppression and liberation, psychopolitical analysis may benefit *political scientists* studying the dilemmas of ethnic conflict, *Jungians* searching for an application of depth psychology to social issues, *politicians* seeking a basis for policies to promote social justice, and *activists* committed to advancing human rights.

What Is Psychopolitical Analysis?

In a special number of the *International Political Science Review* on psychopolitics, Marvick introduces psychopolitical analysis as an approach in political science that applies depth-psychological insights to understand how political actors interact with each other in specific institutional contexts to make political decisions.⁴ This approach relies on personality theories in the study of political leaders. I also use the term, psychopolitical analysis, to mean the application of depth-psychological insights, but to persons in popular political culture, who may or may not be leaders. Furthermore, I seek to understand political consciousness, rather than political decisions.

What Is the Psychopolitics of Liberation?

The psychopolitics of liberation applies depth-psychological insights in order to understand the political consciousness of the oppressed and the conditions, which either promote or inhibit its development, whether in advanced or emerging nations. Oppression refers to unjust relationships between people in a society: exploitation, discrimination, repression, and denial of human rights. Liberation, in contrast, refers to just relationships: self-reliance, nondiscrimination, self-government, and respect for human rights.

A comparison of the “psychopolitics of liberation” with the theology and psychology of liberation further refines its meaning. Liberation and oppression have a meaning common to all three.

The Theology of Liberation

The theology of liberation refers to the theory and practice of theology, under conditions of oppression, and for the benefit of the poor. In the 1960s, a new movement within the clergy of the Latin American Catholic Church reformulated its theology in solidarity with the oppressed. Its “preferential option for the poor” contrasted with the traditional role of the Church, as legitimator and ally of dominant social classes.

As Practice. The practice of liberation theology in Christian Base Communities aims to raise the religious and political consciousness of the poor. This is where “grass-roots groups of working class or peasant Catholics who, armed with bibles, both reinterpreted Christian faith to link it with progressive politics and embraced an ethic of social action.”⁵ Biblical stories are discussed as lessons for the liberation struggles of the oppressed.

As Theory. The theology of liberation understands the root causes of oppression in terms of the theory of dependence. This theory explains underdevelopment and oppression in Latin America as by-products of the capitalist development of the advanced countries. The religious content of liberation theology redefines “sin” as the ultimate cause of oppression (exploitation, discrimination, repression, and denial of human rights). It is a sin not to love God and thy neighbor. Equally important is the redefinition of “salvation” as violence by the oppressed in order to regain their self-reliance and create a socialist society where Christian love and brotherhood are possible.⁶

The Psychology of Liberation

The psychology of liberation is the practice of psychology under the conditions of state repression.⁷ Martín-Baró was among the first to propose an appropriate role for psychologists to play during the civil wars in Central America.⁸ Hollander extends the ideas of Martín-Baró to examine the practice of psychology under conditions of state repression in the Southern Cone countries of Latin America during the 1970s and 1980s.⁹ Hollander’s views below refine the meaning of liberation psychology.¹⁰

As Practice. Psychotherapy in the context of state repression, in the “culture of fear,” cannot be politically neutral. Rather, the psychology of liberation is psychotherapy that engages mental health professionals politically

1. to be “at the service of those engaged in the radical transformation of society,” and
2. to free patients, who are victims of state repression, from “the terrors of dictatorship and social violence.”¹¹

As Theory. Theorizing about state repression is committed to the well-being of the victims.¹² Liberation psychology studies the psychology of political repression

1. to understand the psychological tools used by authoritarian states to gain domination over their citizens,
2. to understand the psychological defenses of citizens as they adapt to the rules of repression,
3. to understand the “psychological factors that contribute to the human capacity to struggle against political oppression and to sustain hope in the possibility of fighting on behalf of peace and social justice,”¹³ and
4. to answer key questions: What is the human capacity to inflict and endure violence? Can victims of violence rebuild loving relationships? Why have revolutionary movements against oppressive regimes so often failed? Why have past revolutionary leadership and strategies been problematic?¹⁴

The Psychopolitics of Liberation

I coined this term to mean psychopolitical analysis at the service of the oppressed.

As Practice. This analysis may take the form of designing

1. programs to raise the political consciousness of the oppressed,¹⁵
2. public policies that create the social conditions favorable to healing the psychic wounds of oppression, and
3. direct action strategies to confront oppression.

As Theory. The theory explains the transformation of oppressed consciousness, according to the perspective of psychopolitics.

Though no particular theories or thinkers are necessarily linked to the psychopolitics of liberation, my approach relies on the ideas of Jungian psychology, Albert Memmi, and Paulo Freire.

The theory also guides the study of the struggle for control over the political consciousness of the oppressed:

1. The political consciousness of the oppressors and the means by which they dominate the political consciousness of the oppressed.
2. The political consciousness of the oppressed and the means by which they assure the authenticity of their political consciousness.
3. The psychopolitical analysis of oppression and liberation. My chief questions on *oppression* are: Why is oppression so stable? Why do the oppressed not revolt more often? On *liberation*: Why do some oppressed people, rather than others, succeed in liberating themselves? Why do some oppressed people become leaders of liberation struggles? On *political consciousness*: What promotes or inhibits the development of political consciousness? What promotes the healing of the psychic wounds of oppression?

Who are Memmi, Freire, and Jung?

The psychopolitical analysis in this book draws on the ideas of three humanists: Albert Memmi and Paulo Freire on political consciousness, and C. G. Jung on depth psychology. A summary of their best-known contributions serves to introduce them.

Albert Memmi (born 1920) is a Tunisian sociologist and novelist, teaching at the University of Paris. Being both Jewish and Berber, he drew upon his

own bicultural experience under colonial rule to discern the psychology of the oppressed. His analysis, found in *The Colonizer and the Colonized* (1957), correctly predicted the end of colonialism.

Paulo Freire (1921–1997) was a Brazilian educator teaching worldwide during fifteen years of political exile before returning home. Growing up in the northeast of Brazil and sensitive to its poverty, he devised educational programs to promote the literacy and political consciousness of the oppressed. His best-known book, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, was published in 1969.

C. G. Jung (1875–1961) was a Swiss psychiatrist and the founder of analytical psychology. His clinical practice and analysis of his own unconscious enabled him to create pioneering theories of the psyche and methods of psychotherapy. His work, linking religion, mythology, anthropology, dreams, art, and politics, is introduced to the general public in a book he edited, *Man and His Symbols* (1964).

What Is Special About This Book?

The Interdisciplinary Training of the Author

As a political scientist, I have specialized on the political economy and the political thought of the Third World, the latter including the works of Fanon, Gandhi, Freire, and Memmi. In midcareer my fascination with Jungian psychology led me to spend four years in the program to train analysts at the C. G. Jung Institute of Zurich. My new knowledge of depth psychology came to fruition as I discovered linkages to politics that I have been exploring during the last sixteen years.

The Psychopolitical Analysis of Oppression and Liberation

This book presents a new application of psychopolitical analysis, namely to the study of oppression and liberation, rather than elite decision-making.

The Application of Jungian Psychology to the Study of Political Consciousness

This is the first book to integrate the ideas of Jungian psychology with those of Freire and Memmi, and to apply them to the study of political consciousness in oppressive societies.¹⁶

The Comparative Analysis of the Political Consciousness of the Oppressed in Ethnically Divided Societies

This study innovates by making a comparative analysis of the personal testimonies of four Native people, in Canada and Guatemala. The comparisons lead to general conclusions about the development of political consciousness, psychopolitical healing, and the relationship of their intrapsychic conflict to interethnic conflict, in these two societies.

How Is the Book Organized?

The book was written in the same order as the chapters are numbered, except that chapter 1 came after chapter 2, and the Introduction was written last. The book chronicles a series of discoveries. In part I, each chapter introduces a newly discovered linkage between an aspect of political consciousness and a concept of Jungian psychology, as the chapter titles suggest. After completing chapters 1–3, I began the first case study, expecting to find evidence of “oppressed consciousness.” Failing in this, I had to describe what I had found, by devising a new concept, “liberated consciousness,” which became the topic of a new chapter 4. Only then could I pursue the case studies.

In part I, “Theories of Political Consciousness,” each chapter links an aspect of political consciousness to a concept in Jungian psychology. The linkages between the paired concepts elaborate the depth-psychological significance of political consciousness. Chapters 1–4 offer alternative formulations of the relationship between the political and psychological development of the person.

Chapter 1, “Conscientization and Individuation,” initiates the reader to Jungian psychopolitical analysis by comparing the political and psychological development of the person, represented, respectively, by Freire’s stages of conscientization and the Jungian stages of individuation.

Chapter 2, “Humanization and Complexes,” describes the transition from dehumanization to humanization, according to Freire, that entails the confrontation of inferiority and dependence complexes in the oppressed.

Chapter 3, “Decolonization and Narcissism,” explains the transition from colonized to revolutionary consciousness, according to Memmi, that springs from the impasse in the precarious relationship between the narcissistic grandiosity of the colonizer and narcissistic depression of the colonized.

Chapter 4, “Liberated Consciousness and the Tension of Opposites,” reveals how oppressed consciousness mirrors oppression in society, and how they are interrelated. Next, it explains how liberated consciousness emerges among those who endure the tension of opposites, where the opposites are

contrary self-images (of inferiority and superiority, dependence and paternalism) conveyed by ethnic groups in conflict. This chapter integrates the ideas of Memmi, Freire, and Jungian psychology, presented in the previous chapters, and serves as the basis for the case studies in part II.

Part II, “Cases of Liberated Consciousness,” applies the theories of political consciousness from part I to the analysis of personal testimonies of four oppressed persons.

Chapter 5, “The Study of Political Consciousness in Ethnically Divided Societies,” introduces the case studies of four Native people, living under conditions of oppression, in Guatemala and British Columbia, Canada. The twin aims of the case studies are to learn, from their personal testimonies, about both their liberated consciousness and psychopolitical healing. This chapter presents the rationale for the use of personal testimonies as data, for the selection and comparison of cases, and for the generalization of findings.

Chapter 6, “Atanasio,” analyzes the personal testimony of a Quiché Maya man in Guatemala. Source: Catherine Vigor, ed. *Atanasio: Parole d’Indien du Guatemala*. Paris: L’Harmattan, 1993.

Chapter 7, “James Sewid,” examines the personal testimony of a Kwakiutl man in Canada. Source: James P. Spradley, ed. *Guests Never Leave Hungry: The Autobiography of James Sewid, a Kwakiutl Indian*. Montreal and Kingston: McGill-Queen’s University Press, 1969.

Chapter 8, “Lee Maracle,” analyzes the personal testimony of a Coastal Salish and Métis woman in Canada. Sources: Lee Maracle, *Bobbi Lee, Indian Rebel*. Toronto: Women’s Press, 1990; Lee Maracle, *I Am Woman: A Native Perspective on Sociology and Feminism*. Vancouver: Press Gang Publishers, 1996.

Chapter 9, “Rigoberta Menchú,” studies the personal testimony of a Quiché Maya woman in Guatemala. Sources: Elisabeth Burgos-Debray, ed. *I, Rigoberta Menchú: An Indian Woman in Guatemala*. London: Verso, 1984; Rigoberta Menchú, *Crossing Borders*. London: Verso, 1998.

Chapter 10, “Psychopolitical Healing,” synthesizes the findings, from the four case studies, on the attainment of liberated consciousness and the healing of the psychological wounds of oppression, both within the context of the individuation process. After proposing several public policies to promote the psychopolitical healing of Native people, the chapter offers some concluding thoughts on the psychopolitics of liberation.

PART I

Theories of Political Consciousness