

## **From Critical Social Psychology to Critical Community Psychology:**

### **From one crisis to another ?**

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#### **Abstract**

Despite the growing literature in critical community psychology (CCP), little is known about its formation as a sub-discipline of psychology. This paper investigates the emergence and origins of CCP (Kagan et al., 2011), by taking into consideration the dialectic relationship between theoretical forces of critical social psychology (CSP) community psychology (CP) and sociopolitical, radical movements. Starting from the crisis in social psychology (SP), it is noted how the debates around epistemology and methodology during the crisis (Parker, 2007), lead to the emergence of CSP. CSP'S critical theory became fruitful in the development of CP's critical orientation. CSP's critical character has been adopted by CP. The multidisciplinary field of CP is approached as a move from CSP's critical theory to community *praxis*<sup>2</sup>. However, it is argued that CP should be simultaneously conceptualized as being in a perceptual crisis which led to the formation of CCP's area. The radical departure from CP to CCP is discussed firstly on CP's failure to articulate a collective transformative community *praxis* (Thompson, 2005) and secondly on some community

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<sup>2</sup> The term *praxis* is used as Ignacio Martín-Baró introduced it, a new way of thinking that conceives of truth as a task hand, an account of what needs to be done (Martín-Baró, 1994, p.6)

psychologists' need to contrast with acritical and clinically oriented North American version of CP in UK (Fryer and Laing, 2008), inspired by the theory of CSP's and liberation's psychology theory and *praxis* (Martín-Baró, 1994). Therefore, CCP's development is concluded firstly as another critical counter-paradigm aiming to redress the relationship between critical social theory and critical community *praxis*. Secondly, CCP's emergence is examined also as a possible outcome of the various crises of the sub-disciplines of CSP and CP.

**Keywords:** Critical Community Psychology, Community Psychology, crisis, critical theory, praxis

## **Introduction**

Psychology as an autonomous discipline since 19<sup>th</sup> century has an ambiguous relationship with its history. Although many attempts have been made to form a specific narrative about the history of psychology (Mandler, 2011), it is evident that most of them tend to ignore not only the historicity of psychology's subject matter, but also the historicity of the peculiar way that psychology was established as a distinct discipline. The same can be applied to the history of social psychology (SP). According to the mainstream tradition, SP is often treated as the outcome of an accumulative process of knowledge production. Nevertheless, many theorists and historians (Danziger, 1994; Rose, 1996;) have argued that things are not as simple as that. The birth of SP has been accompanied by fierce debates with regard to the nature of the individual, the relationship between individual and society, distinct epistemological and methodological approaches to knowledge production, as well as the political nature of the field. Thus, instead of uncritically endorsing histories that provide legitimacy and scientific status to the field of mainstream SP, this article will explore both a critical episode in its history and the reasons that led to these debates (Samelson, 2000, p.500).

The history of SP cannot be approached without understanding the crisis of the North-American strand of the discipline which characterized the 1970s and the upcoming stream of critical social psychology (CSP). The crisis was a phenomenon of intense questioning and disfavor of the experimental, a-political, value-free and neutral position of SP by that time (Greenwood, 2004; 2003). As it will be depicted the emergence of community psychology (CP) is inherently related with the crisis of

SP, since community psychologists tried to provide *praxis* out of the deadlock of mainstream SP and the critical theory, produced by the stream of CSP. Proponents of CSP were and still are usually under the fire of criticism for providing only a critique of mainstream SP, without proposing any solution to the practical ‘real life’ problems. From this point of view-which is not completely false- CP can be ‘visualized’ as a transient point from critical theory to community *praxis*, having adjusted the critical character of CSP in its community context.

However, it is argued that despite CP’s major influence in changing how central features of psychology’s theories and practice are perceived, both in SP and CSP, CP failed to address the issues that made its birth possible. In this way, CP could be perceived as in a perpetual crisis. Some researchers claim that CP has only achieved a “partial paradigm shift” insofar as community psychologists have focused only on ameliorative change in a very local level. Another line of criticism is that the field has not addressed adequately the concerns of its more marginalized constituents (Cosgrove and McHugh, 2000). Stemming from this, the emergence of critical community psychology (CCP) is approached as another attempt to face the challenges of psychology’s history from the beginning and it is suggested that CCP can be conceptualized as a further step to community *praxis*.

Therefore, the purpose of the present study is to examine the emergence of CCP. It aims to critically explore how a complex, dialectic relationship between intra-disciplinary debates and crises in the fields of SP, CSP, CP and external historical, socio-political processes, cultivated a theoretical framework, critical enough, to practically tackle the issues that previous streams failed to approach and challenge. Tracing how the crisis in SP has played a significant role in the emergence of CSP’s

critical theory which became fruitful for CP's critical orientation, CCP is discussed as another critical-practical paradigm and/or an outcome of various crises of various sub-disciplines of psychology (SP, SCP, CP) starting even from the detachment of psychology from philosophy and psychology's formation as an autonomous discipline.

### **The crisis in social psychology: From social to critical social psychology**

#### *What preceded the crisis – The birth of mainstream social psychology*

It is well known that the emancipation of psychology and its detachment from philosophy gradually took place during the second half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. The main argument was that “the issues in psychological research are not reducible to philosophical ones” (Furedy, 1988, p.71). The formation of psychology as an autonomous discipline is therefore linked to the creation of Wilhelm Wundt's experimental laboratory in Leipzig in 1879 (Dafermos and Marvakis, 2006). As Parker argues (2015, p.3) “the very earliest studies of the present-day discipline of ‘psychology’ were Wundt's introspective studies in which the researcher and the subject swapped places”. The separation between the ‘experimenter’ and the ‘subject’ was established at the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century – in the beginning of 20<sup>th</sup> century, and was intensified as this early psychology was transplanted into the U.S.A.

While the First World War was taking place, the logic of psychometric evaluation had been established and there were two theoretical tendencies inside the field, behaviorism in America and gestalt theory in Austria and Germany (Marvakis and Mentinis, 2011, p.53). Later, with the establishment of totalitarian regimes in Europe, social psychologists migrated to the U.S.A. The main outcome of this

transition was the transformation of Gestalt psychology to cognitive psychology under the influence of the information revolution.

The SP as we know it, an experimental sub-discipline of psychology, was born during the second half of the 20th century, in North America, in the aftermath of the Second World War. The last paved the way for a series of surveys involving the adaptation and the participation of soldiers in conditions of war and its consequences on techniques that had to do with the measurement of attitudes, the prediction of behaviour and the conduct of psychological war (Marvakis and Mentinis, 2011, p.53; Rose, 1999, p.15).

Many studies, during the Second World War in the areas mentioned above, have been funded from agencies of the American army and other governmental institutions in order to develop through experimental research, knowledge that could be used for manipulation and control objectives (Marvakis and Mentinis, 2011). The fact that psychologists had been recruited as managers in the US military, which was carrying out experimental research, is inextricably related with the establishment of positivism and experimentation as the main theoretical, research paradigms and the institutional recognition of psychology (Dafermos and Marvakis, 2013). They helped epistemologically and methodologically the development of the field into a well-promising objective science. Experiment was not just another methodology. It was and still remains the “hidden anthropology” of the whole field (Holzkamp, 1972).

In this way, there were two perspectives inside the field of SP, the psychological and the sociological SP, with leading representatives Floyd Henry Allport and George Herbert Mead, respectively. Given the brevity of the paper the focus will be drawn only to the psychological perspective of SP. The psychological

SP, which led and finally formed what is now called ‘mainstream social psychology’, included many characteristics from Cartesian philosophy, such as the adoption of certain forms of dualism (mind/body, individual/society, subject/object, organism/environment, knowledge/action). Therefore, a great deal of the individualist character of SP can be attributed to this inheritance (Good, 2000). Individualism, in general played a pernicious role in the formation of the field of SP. It was a tendency that actually cut off SP from its core, society and culture, limiting the field in the research, measurement and experimentation of the individual behavior.

Analytically, in contrast with G. H. Mead who emphasized the social dimension of the field, F. H. Allport argued that “the greatest incubus” in SP is the emphasis upon the group. As noted by Allport (1919, p.298-299) “Psychology either individual or social must focus on the neuro-motor system of the individual. We must repeat that the word ‘social’ has no significance except as denoting a certain type of environment and the part played by it in the post-natal behavior of the organism”.

All things considered, SP as a scientific field was a “product” of North America until 20th century. The individualistic SP has been established, according to Greenwood, (2004; 2003) until the decades of 1960 and 1970, where many academics raised their critical voice, critiquing the way SP has been formed, as an individualistic, positivist and experimental field in social sciences. The history of SP could not be approached without taking into consideration the crisis of the North-American strand of the discipline which characterized the 1970s. In this way a brief modern exploration of the crisis is followed as to understand both what constituted the crisis and therefore how CSP emerged as a stream. Crisis in SP has played a significant role in the emergence of CSP and the theoretical tenets of it. Hence, it is

fruitful to consider what constituted the development of CSP, as CSP's critical theory offered one the one hand the critical theoretical, epistemological and methodological background to CP, as the transient point from critical theory to community *praxis* and on the other hand its critical character to both CP and CCP.

### *Crisis in social psychology*

According to Parker (1989, p.11), the crisis in SP concerns a 'paradigm, political and conceptual crisis'. Firstly, if the notion of 'paradigm' is considered as a framework of assumptions, then SP is seen since 1970s as being governed by the notion that individual behavior can be understood by laboratory and experimental methodologies. The paradigm crisis includes what has been termed the "crisis in theoretical and epistemological foundations of social psychology" (Dafermos, 2015, p.396). SP promoted itself as an advanced paradigm which focuses on accounts as it assimilates facts by accommodating itself to the real world. What counts for the traditional paradigm, is the image of progress and perception. Progress helps us work along with the *paradigm story* while perception guides us through analyses the problems of the everyday life. However, the problem is that SP involves neither progress nor perception. In this way, it has been criticized for its artificial nature (Parker, 1989, p.11). Experiments are not sufficient in order to study complex social phenomena. Actually, laboratory experiments decontextualize reality and thus it is impossible for social psychology to deepen its analysis in everyday social problems (Dafermos, 2015, p.396).

Secondly, the political crisis reflects the economic and political crises in the culture in which it arose. It flows from the cultural context of the paradigm crisis which includes "tensions between American and European social psychology that

have been organized by the distribution of economic power in the world, which is mediated by the relationships between America and Europe (Dafermos, 2015, p.398). Power and ideology accompanied the development of the discipline. Thus, science attained a superior status, as a result of political and institutional pressures. Therefore, what is needed is to explore, reveal and contest the power relationships that formed the discipline. To do this it is necessary to contest the position of SP because it was established as an experimental-laboratory science, which supported a particular image of the human subject, as mentioned earlier (Parker, 1989, p.29).

Lastly, conceptual-crisis discusses how SP incorporated the notion of modernity. The latter prioritizes individuals, human sciences and the notion of progress. Nevertheless, modernity is contradictory. On the one hand it proposes that scientific truth is the solution to humans' problems, on the other hand attributes responsibility to make meaning to individuals (Parker, 1989, p.48). In any case, Silverman argues that SP's failure to offer a specific direction to people's daily problems can be attributed to its narrow vision that social reality can be studied experimentally.

In this way the paradigm, political and conceptual crises adumbrated SP's permanent crisis as the field is racked by a number of intersecting crises as it will be shown. By the decades of 1960 and 1970 while the crisis was taking place, many academics and people were expressing their dissatisfaction with SP, as it failed to provide answers to the social questions of that time, for instance, the rebelliousness of American youth, protests against the Vietnam War, Black and Women's movement etc.(Dafermos, 2015, p.397). Therefore the crisis in SP has been accompanied by broader social and political changes which raised questions in relation to the field's

relationship with the social and political reality. The need to create a theory critical enough to frame and relate people's daily social and political problems was interwoven in the crisis of SP and the acute emergence of CSP.

By that time the antipsychiatry movement (represented by the following psychiatrists: R.D. Laing (Laing, 1990), D. Cooper (Cooper, 1967), T.S. Szasz (Szasz, 1984) was questioning the individualistic conceptions of "madness". The social and political movements such as May 68 (Jackson, Milne and Williams, 2011), gay liberation, feminist, civil rights, anti-war movement were emphasizing in their need of another kind/version of SP. An outstanding example was the student movement in the Free University of Berlin (FUB), which played a pivotal role in the emergence of critical psychology and the foundation of the first Critical University in July of 1967.

Thus, CSP's emergence took place under a highly politicized era. In this way an analysis of what constituted CSP's theoretical background is followed in order to consider how it influenced the CP's theoretical formation and critical orientation.

### *The formation of critical social psychology*

From the crisis of SP different schools and paradigms emerged. For instance, the theories of social cognition (Higgins, 2000), social identity (Hogg and Abrams, 1988) and social representation (Moscovici, 1963) belong to those schools/paradigms that emerged, especially as a response to SP's crisis. However, the focus will be drawn on CSP as an additional stream which developed in response to the crisis and had a major influence in CP's critical character.

According to Hepburn (2003) Marxist, feminist, psychoanalytic and post-structuralist theory contributed to the emergence of CSP. Although these theories were external to the central dogmas of the field and they existed before the crisis of SP, they offered a broader theoretical, epistemological and methodological base to adumbrate CSP's formation as a critical social science (Hepburn, 2003). Therefore, their brief exploration is necessary as to understand how CSP has been developed. Also, CSP's critical theory and formation by those or some of those theories influenced CP's emergence, as the transient point from critical theory to community *praxis*.

Critical theory as a reinvention of Marx's critical method, flourished in the 1930s inside the Frankfurt School. It was concerned with the elimination of oppression and the promotion of social justice and signified a departure from traditional social science theory which supported the status quo (Davidson et al., 2006; Hepburn, 2003). The epistemic concern of critical theory, the need to create a theory to understand how society operates and how it can be changed, espoused a dialectic view of change, which maintained that people and social structures are reciprocally determined (Davidson et al., 2006, p.36).

As Parker suggests, from a Marxist perspective, psychology can be seen as an ideology which prevents people from seeing the oppression of class position by focusing on themselves and other individuals as the source of any problems that arise. "The elements of alienation and reification that characterize capitalism are condensed in the discipline of psychology and the task of critical psychology is to expose and combat the witting and unwitting abuse of power that psychologists enjoy, including the analysis of discourse in our writing and unwriting" (Hepburn, 2003, p.47). The

inclusion of discourse analysis reflects the utter political aim, the “*practical deconstruction*” of hegemonic discourses, constructed by psychology. It also reflects on Foucault’s conceptualization of power as embedded in discourses which have an essential ‘action orientation’ as a social practice (Heritage, 1984). The notion of *deconstruction* characterizes not only post structuralist theory but Marxist and feminist theory as well. It could be argued that it became the driving force in CSP’s formation.

Moreover, for those who followed Marx’s materialist approach, psychoanalysis offered a ‘theory of the subject’ in CSP that as Parker mentioned, filled the gaps left by Marxist theory (Hepburn, 2003, p.47). At the same time it is accurate to criticize psychoanalysis for reducing the effects of the economic contradictions of capitalism to individual disposition (Parker, 1997). In addition to the latter, Billig (1976) agrees that psychoanalytic explanation reduces social conflict to inner unconscious conflict.

However, according to Parker (1997), psychoanalysis is the ‘repressed other’ of the positivist experimental aspects of mainstream social psychology. In this way, although these ‘beliefs’ are keeping people chained to their oppression, psychoanalysis enhances the field of CSP (Parker, 1997) by a) interpreting ideology and revealing its power, focusing on people’s unconscious processes, b) providing an account of the subject’s continuity, c) recognizing peoples’ fundamental irrationality (Hollway, 1984, p.205).

Furthermore, around 1970s, while the second feminist wave was taking place, feminists questioning women’s inferiority constructed by mainstream SP, challenged the ‘objectivity and neutrality’ of the field. One way for challenging the stereotypical

formulation of women's inferiority was to examine how-taken-for-granted assumptions about gender were built into people's everyday descriptions. According to Kitzinger (1989) what is needed is to *deconstruct* our everyday expectations about gender and social organization. In accordance with Marxist theory, feminist theory recognized as an acute priority the *deconstruction* of the mainstream discourses because it could disrupt assumptions in the practical politics of everyday life and produce a politics of change (Butler, 1997). Hence, *deconstruction* became an ultimate political aim and tool in the field of CSP in general, and in the field of critical social feminist psychology in particular. For instance, Judith Butler's (1993, p.21-50) conceptualization of gender as a 'discursive practice' and gender identity as a 'performative' accomplishment, is such an example, influenced by John Austin's (1962) speech act theory.

Post-structuralist thought was centered also by the notion of *deconstruction*. Derrida's work on *deconstruction* can be placed in the context of Saussure's structural 'semiology' which challenges the idea that language has to reflect the realities that the rational mind observes. He argues that any system of thought has some kind of center or *logos* – for Marx, social/ production relations, for Freud, the unconscious, for structuralism, the structure of language, and so on. So, in order to reify a meaning, to posit it as some superior representation of reality through the logic and structure of metaphysics, the different concepts that help shape its meaning are going to be subordinated. By subordinating certain concepts, some originary meaning of *logos* appears (Hepburn, 2003, p.206; Pada, 2007). Derrida depicts that term could not have a neutral meaning. In this way, using *deconstruction* in CSP does not imply that it is just a method of identifying hierarchies and overturning them. In contrast, it implies

that the focus on language in the broader field, subverts claims to truth and realism into an ethical and political move – CSP’s political move (Hepburn, 2003, p.210).

Having given a description to a certain extent of CSP’s formation, it is necessary to reflect on the fire of criticism that CSP has received for only critiquing the mainstream of SP without proposing any solution to the problems faced in the post-modern society. Although the last is not completely false, critical social psychologists have argued that deconstructing for example the hegemonic discourses, is a form of active resistance. While CSP’s deconstructing orientation and discourse analytic position, indeed is and can be conceptualized as an *action*, the present study conceptualizes practice as Ignacio Martín-Baró introduced *praxis*, as a collective engagement in social action where we transform ourselves as well as transforming our reality. Standing by the oppressed, working with the oppressed we involve ourselves in a new *praxis*, an activity of transforming reality. The de-ideologization of the everyday experience, as knowledge is socially constructed - alike CSP, is an urgent task, nevertheless, is conceptualized as a step towards *praxis* (Martín-Baró, 1994, p.28, 30-31). Therefore, understanding *praxis* as an action which helps in practice the socially disadvantaged groups, it can be claimed that CSP has partially succeeded in providing a solution in the daily practical problems of people.

CSP’s stance in terms of practice and *action* may be considered as another discipline crisis – CSP’s crisis, which contributed to the emergence of CP. However, it is indisputable that CSP’s development by Marxist, psychoanalytic, feminist and post structuralist theories contributed to the formation of CP’s critical character. CP embraced CSP’s theoretical, epistemological and methodological background but also introduced the psychosocial term in the phenomena’s analysis, aiming to provide a

critical theory which will be strong enough on the one hand to deconstruct the hegemonic discourses, which detached completely the individual from its social environment and on the other hand to provide a *praxis* that can transform social reality.

### **Community psychology: From social to communal**

CSP was very important for the transformation of CP into a critical discipline. Since 1960s community psychologists have been affected from the debates in SP around *individualism, positivism* and *apolitical thought*. CSP's stance to those debates offered the fruitful framework in CP's theoretical, epistemological and methodological formation. However, what must be taken into consideration is that there is neither chronological order nor a specific causal relationship between CSP and CP. Indeed, it could be claimed that CP existed before CSP.

Another crucial point is that CP highlights the move from CSP's critical theory to community *praxis*. Moreover, the emergence of CP as a critical emancipatory project which provided a community *praxis* out of the deadlock of both mainstream asocial SP's and CSP's theory, does not mean either the end of CSP or the abandonment by mainstream psychology of a more traditional or conservative approach in dealing with community issues. Nevertheless, it can be argued that indeed CSP is the key incident, the transient point from CSP's critical thought to CP's '*praxis*'. Thus, an exploration of how CSP's stance around the notion of individualism, its turn to more qualitative methodologies and its move to more political action theories influenced the formation of CP, is discussed.

Most of the theories in mainstream SP focus on the individual and especially in their behavior. Therefore they try to explain his/her behavior based on strategies of self-monitoring and modification in various forms of psychotherapy. CSP, critiquing the individualistic position of SP, argued that people cannot be understood apart from their context. By the time that the crisis was taking place, the conception of “blaming the victim” (Ryan, 1971, p.143) was widespread. The individual was presented as the only responsible for the causes of and solutions to any problem. In this way CP, instead of focusing on individual characteristics, adopted the theoretical framework of CSP and formed as a study of people in context (Rappaport, 1977). She established a more holistic, ecological analysis of the person, with multiple social systems ranging from micro to macro sociopolitical structures (Prilleltensky and Nelson, 2010, p.5), emphasizing on the strengths of people and communities.

Kagan et al. (2011, p.18) argue that people were seen as disconnected atoms in the field of SP. However after the crisis in SP, the individual-centered position had changed. CSP’s paradigms focusing on the interrelation between the individual and the society, tried to pave the way for a more holistic theory of the subject. Seeing human beings as becoming who and what they are, through interacting in a social organized world, influenced CP to oppose a reductionist approach of both individuals and social phenomena. Rejecting individualism as an approach, CP aimed to understand “the psychological as both emerging from and dependent on social relations, not only interpersonal ones but also collective and social systemic relations” (Kagan et al., 2011, p.19-20). Taking everything into consideration, it is evident that CSP’s opposition to individualistic thought enriched CP’s theoretical framework with a theory of people in context. At this point, the epistemological and methodological

background of CP is going to be argued, on the basis of critical social feminist psychology (CSFP). As feminists provided the epistemology and the methodology in the formation of CSP, so they did in CP respectively.

In the beginning, CP was striving to establish its credibility by conducting post-positivist research, emphasizing on objectivity and hypothesis testing (Nelson and Evans, 2014, p.159). However, nowadays, qualitative methods are preferred and there are reasons why they became so fruitful for many CP studies (Montero, 2011). Qualitative methodologies generally flourished under the feminist paradigm during the crisis in SP. Feminist researchers claimed many of the classic psychological theories emerged from studies focused only on men and their results generalized in the whole population (Wilkinson, 2003). In this way they questioned the objectivity of the field by saying that the way women are being evaluated is not valid (Rosser, 1992, p.538).

While the second feminist wave was taking place, feminists (especially Marxist and socialist) were viewing all knowledge as socially constructed rejecting, the value free position in knowledge, positivism and individualism. In this way, CP's social constructionist epistemological framework has been adopted in part by feminist research, which actually means that psychologists in order to understand people's experience, need to consider first the language they use and the conditions which permit and shape their experiences (Cosgrove and McHugh, 2000). Therefore, to investigate these conditions, qualitative methodologies are needed (Henwood and Pidgeon, 1995). The latter became valuable for feminist research and CP, as mainstream SP's research methods were decontextualizing the individual from its environment by examining it in laboratories. According to Orford (2008, p.11),

person and context are intertwined inseparably. Therefore, the fact that CP emphasized the importance of everyday life, made necessary the move towards more qualitative ways of research (Bergold, 2000, p.3).

Moreover, feminist research examining the relationship between social injustice and emotional distress, recognized the need for social change, arguing that theory is political and action has theoretical implications (Reinharz, 1992). In this way, they emphasized upon action oriented research agendas which became a distinctively driving force for CP. CP embraced not only action oriented research but also participatory action research (P.A.R.), (Cosgrove and McHugh, 2000, p.819). At the same time, feminist research was interested in giving voice to women's experiences. In Caroll Gilligan's (1982) book, for instance, 'In a Different Voice', to give voice is conceptualized as physical proximity, dialogue and interaction. The discipline of CP is based on that notion, that giving voice to marginalized people is the first step of their empowerment<sup>3</sup> which can be implemented only by conducting P.A.R. (Cosgrove and McHugh, 2000, p.821). Not to mention that the notion of empowerment is congruent with the feminist agenda as well (see, for example, Worell and Remer, 2002).

Furthermore, both feminists and community psychologists acknowledge that reflexivity should be an integral part of the research process (Cosgrove and McHugh, 2000, p.828). Giving voice to the oppressed or at least listening to their voice presupposes that researches question who they are in relation to those they study (Reinharz, 1992, p.15). Therefore, they should ask questions to guide the reflexive

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<sup>3</sup> As Rappaport (1987, p.142) noted empowerment 'suggests a belief in the power of people to be both masters of their own fate and involved in the life of their several communities'.

process and constitute an ambivalent, relationship between the researcher and the researched.

All things considered, the conduct of interviews and observation was the first step in the formation of qualitative methodology. For feminists, interview and observation, were the tools to reveal the power relationships that were experienced as ‘subjects’ in the scientific research (Shape and Jefferson, 1990). CP used this tool to understand in depth people’s lived experiences. Specifically, observation helped them to study people in their context (Prilleltensky and Nelson, 2010). In addition, feminists were struggling to value women’s experience in relation to their own terms. In this way, they created feminist ethnomethodology because it focused on the construction of gender, sexual harassment, prostitution and mental health (Kitzinger, 2000). At the same time, CP embraced ethnographic research to understand better the culture of a setting of people (Prilleltensky and Nelson, 2010, p.288).

Additionally, a notable contribution of the feminist research in CP was the Discourse Analysis (DA). Although there are different approaches to discourse analysis (Fairclough, 1995; Van Dijk, 2001; Wetherell and Potter, 2007), there is a common emphasis on the study and function of language in order to identify dominant discourses. The turn to post structuralism enhanced the theories around *discourse* with a very useful methodological and political tool, deconstruction (Cosgrove and McHugh, 2000). For example in CP, the psychiatric professionals’ medical discourse is considered as dominant. Therefore, it has to be deconstructed either by conducting DA on medical discourse or by implementing DA in the stories of survivors of ‘mental illnesses’. Feminist Critical Discourse Analysis (FCDA),

alike, focused on the ways in which power is produced and transformed in engendering discursive practices (Krolokke and Sorensen, 2006).

Feminist thought either from within or outside psychology has been one of the major theoretical, epistemological and methodological stimuli in the formation of CSP which led towards the development of a gender sensitive CP. Nowadays CP is concerned with women's empowerment, deconstructing the societal structures which distress women and other marginalized groups, and questioning gendered related bias (Bond and Mulvey, 2000, p.600).

Additionally, CSP led to a shift from a-political theory to a political contextualization of knowledge. It has already been argued that SP persuades people that a problem can be reduced to the way someone feels or thinks. This prevalent idea distracts people from conceptualizing themselves as agents of political action and change. Therefore, CSP focuses on the social and political aspect of phenomena, advocating the establishment of a real social science which will question the dominant view and will lead to social change (Parker, 2007). The fact that CSP emerged under an intense political period, as it has been depicted, played a major role in the position of CSP as a real social science which takes into consideration the social and political dimension of reality and questions the individualistic, a-social, a-political and value free position of social psychology.

Under these circumstances, CP was born correspondingly in context of social changes which took place during the 1960s in the U.S.A., as an attempt to move from the CSP's politicalized theory to more political contextualized community *praxis*. CP adopted the utter political aim of '*social change*' from CSP and position itself as an active agent. Prilleltensky and Nelson (2010, p.39) suggest that "community

psychology needs to adopt the value of social justice as a major principle, to become more *political*, engage in solidarity with oppressed groups and social change movements”.

In this way CP tried to offer a practical orientation of CSP’s theory aiming for both ameliorative and transformative changes. As a theoretical yet political action-oriented framework, it was seeking to uncover the hidden social and power relationships that kept people oppressed. CP argued that social change can occur in different ecological levels, personal, relational and collective where P.A.R. is conducted in order to achieve change (Burton and Kagan, 2015). Thus, the personal level of change aims to raise the awareness of the disadvantaged people with regard to their unjust oppression, a process which has been called by Paulo Freire as ‘conscientization’ (Freire, 2000). At the relational level, the aim is to succeed interaction with others, through supportive relations in order to regain power. In the collective level, social movements or self-help groups can teach solidarity, which is the basis for resistance, social action and change (Moane, 2003).

### **From Community to Critical Community Psychology**

CP has emerged in a variety of places, under multiple influences and different circumstances. However, each time it has emerged as a counter-paradigm and practice to the traditional functioning of psychology (Fryer and Fagan, 2003, p.90). CP was born in North America (U.S.A. and Canada). Swampscott’s conference in 1965 in Boston was the key event in the acknowledgement of CP as a distinct discipline. The aim of this conference was to discuss the training of psychologists in new roles in community based mental health services (Rickel, 1987, p.511). However, the conference took a different direction calling for a change in the way that mental health

services were perceived. The focus, according to plenty of psychologists that took part in the conference, should be drawn on prevention, service development and social action (Kagan et al., 2011, p.24). This particular focus became the driving force in the establishment of CP as a separate division within American Psychological Association (APA), which became the quasi autonomous Society for Community Research and Action in 1989.

CP emerged later in Australia and in New Zealand concentrated on the ideas of social responsibility, social justice, culture and ethnic issues, taking seriously into consideration the oppression of the respective indigenous populations (see Gridley and Breen, 2007, p.119-139; Robertson and Masters-Awatere, 2007, p.140-163). Meanwhile, in Latin America CP transformed as a discipline from the academic and political psychology. The so called ‘crisis in social psychology’ influenced the formation of CP in Europe, North America and Latin America, highlighting the need for a more politically oriented CP. CP in Latin America has dedicated its work to the social disadvantaged and oppressed groups aiming for their liberation (Burton and Kagan, 2005).

In South Africa, CP correspondingly addressed itself to the inherent societal problems, including the history of the apartheid, reconciliation and continued inequality and oppression in CP’s South African approach. Both Latin America and South Africa versions of CP have been influenced from Marxist theory partly because of its role in the liberation struggle (Bhana, Petersen and Rochat, 2001, p.377-391; Hook, Kiguwa and Mkhize, 2004). Norway (Carlquist, Nafstad and Blakar, 2007, p.282-298), Turkey (Degirmencioglu, 2007, p.356-362), Italy (Francescato et al., 2007, p.263-281), Greece (Triliva and Marvakis, 2007, p.363-374), Ghana (Akotia

and Barimah, 2007, p.407-414) and India (Bhatia and Sethi, 2007, p.180-199) have also developed their own CP.

The last insight will be drawn in the development of CP in Europe, which varies in character between countries. Taking into account the various CP approaches all over the world, it is evident that CP has not been developed as a unified field, although some of its versions may identify their aims and action. The different versions of CP conceptualized and implemented their aim and practice in relation to the version's context, culture and needs.

Specifically in the UK, CP developed very slowly. Nevertheless, since 1990 a network of community psychologists has emerged with roots in environmental, educational, clinical and health psychology (Burton et al., 2007). CP in Britain targeted its aim in building alliances with those who are marginalized under a value-based participatory work which led towards social change (Burton et al., 2007, p.219). However, a number of factors, which are going to be exposed, led to the CP's critique and the upcoming emergence of CCP as another area of critical community *praxis*.

The acritical incorporation of the individualistic North American version of CP in the UK led to CCP's development, as some academics/practitioners disfavored and critiqued this assimilation. UK's CP has been influenced by the dominant version of the individualistic, ethnocentric North America CP. According to Fryer and Laing (2008) the US version of CP has globally dominated the field. The fact that it has more postgraduate training courses, academic staff and more funding for studentships creates more possibilities to attract overseas students. Therefore, while US CP is centered in the individualistic culture of the USA, under the 'community umbrella', which is actually clinically oriented, by attracting, training and exporting back to their

countries more and more overseas students, this “constitutes an intellectual and cultural colonialism” (Fryer and Laing, 2008, p.9).

Consequently, assimilating the individualistic version of North American CP, critical community psychologists claimed that CP has ignored the socio-political dimension of their practice that was central earlier in the discipline’s formation and history (Thompson, 2005, p.3). CP, emphasizing the personal and relational level of change, has forgotten the collective one, where socio-political factors, like social class, economic exploitation etc. play a detrimental role. In this way, it could be argued that the crisis in the field never ended. In contrast the crisis in SP has been transformed from the a-social theory to the ‘unpractical’ critical social theory to *praxis* crisis. Hence, it may be claimed that CP embraced the transformation and the continuation of the crises basically from the level of the ‘unpractical’ critical theory to the level of the personal and relational centered community *praxis*. Thus, CCP’s emergence may be conceptualized as a reflection upon both those continuous crises, and specifically as the reflection upon the CP’s community *praxis* crisis.

CCP highlighted concepts, values and ideas in order to address CP’s weaknesses and redress the relationship between critical theory of CSP and community *praxis* (Burton and Kagan, 2001). Social justice, social action, social change, the ecological metaphor, *praxis*, politics, diversity, oppression, liberation, powerlessness and the distinction between working at micro, meso and macro levels are CCP’s central concepts (Burton and Kagan, 2001, p.15). Undoubtedly many of these concepts/values overlap with CP’s, however CCP adopted them and move forward in the implementation critical community *praxis*.

Moreover, it is argued that CCP tried to overcome CP's *praxis crisis* differentiating itself from CP, on two major axes. The radical departure from CP to CCP can be firstly centered in the level of change (*ameliorative versus transformative*) and secondly in the context (*local versus global*) of interventions that are carried out. Most community psychology's interventions are ameliorative in nature. Prevention, support programs and community development initiatives are typically designed to promote well-being at personal and relation level" (Prilleltensky and Nelson, 2010, p.160). In this way, the fact that CP ignored the collective level which is the utter level of system's social change, led to CCP's embracement of a transformative paradigm of intervention, as to implement an actual community *praxis* and change.

Transformative interventions form part of second-order change, they are targeted in the collective level and strive to change the system and its assumptions by challenging and questioning power relationships under the programmatic goal of eliminating oppression (Bennett, 1987; Seidman and Rappaport, 1986). Hence, CCP aimed to promote a community *praxis* which will fundamentally alter the system that keeps people poor, exploited and alienated (Kagan et al., 2011, p.32).

As Kagan et al. argue (2011, p.32) CCP embraced a *liberatory, participatory* and transformational *praxis*. All those terms have been introduced from the stream of liberation psychology in Latin America. First of all, *praxis* denotes the critical reflection and action upon the world in order to transform it. To move in a *new praxis* needs first and foremost to cultivate a critical understanding of yourself and your social reality. It is what Paulo Freire named conscientization (Martín-Baró, 1994, p.41). The person becomes literate and his literacy is related with the ability to read

the surrounding reality, realize the social and political dimensions, make manifest the historical dialectic between individual growth and community organization, between personal liberation and social transformation (Martín-Baró, 1994, p.40-45).

*Praxis is liberatory* because it is a collective and practical task, coming from below, from the marginalized and oppressed majorities. However, CCP makes a step forward proposing not only a *liberatory praxis* but a *pre-figurative praxis* (Kagan et al., 2011, p.61) being inspired both from Antonio Gramsci's concept of 'pre-figurative' action (Devine, Pearmain and Purdy, 2009; Gramsci, 1971) and Ignacio Martín-Baró's notion of *new praxis*. Pre-figurative praxis is not a methodology in itself. It is rather an orientation that guides CCP's role as collaborator and co-learner in complex social environments (Kagan et al., 2011, p.61). Therefore it can be argued that *pre-figurative praxis* it is the pre-figurative orientation where liberatory *praxis* flourishes, by means of action research.

Action research and P.A.R was founded around 1950s in Latin America, by Orlando Fals-Borda (Montero, 2009, p.81). This perspective was strongly supported by the work of Ignacio Martín-Baró and Paulo Freire who used PAR "to encourage poor and deprived communities; to examine and analyze the structural reasons for their oppression" (Baum, MacDougall and Smith, 2006, p.854). Following these roots, CCP embraced alike CP, a *participatory praxis* with communities, based on P.A.R as a critical methodology (Baum, MacDougall and Smith, 2006) aiming to empower people in order to change transformative their lives (Minkler and Wallerstein, 2003, p.5).

Therefore, CCP considers that community *praxis* has to be transformative because working *in partnership with the oppressed* a fundamental social change can be possible (Nelson, Prilleltensky and MacGillivray, 2001).

Secondly, CP and CCP are differentiated in the basis of context of their interventions. A quite thought provoking slogan of CP is “think global, act local”, thus the identification of intervention with local actions is evident. However, critical community psychologists argue that although this slogan focuses on feasible and practical action, it fails actually to articulate the linkages between global and local. Hence, CCP adopted the slogan ‘Global is local and local is global’ as to show that global action is fundamental for social change. Uncoordinated local actions fail to change the whole system of oppression, poverty and exploitation. Transformational community change will come, only if there is a good understanding of how the global system works and an engagement with global issues and their local impacts (Kagan et al., 2011, p.32-33).

The entire rejection of the North American individualistic CP version assimilated in the UK, and the CCP’s positioning on transformative change in a global level, depicts not only the transformation into a more critical version of CP but also implies how CCP tried to embrace a *critical social liberatory theory* in an action oriented critical community *praxis*. The term *critical social* has been adopted by CSP’s roots in critical theory and emerged mostly in the UK. Specifically, the term *critical* reflects on critical psychology’s ideas that mainstream psychology is used as a hidden ideology. In this way, what is most significant is to investigate what are the implications for the distribution of power, for whom and which are the consequences (Parker, 2007, p.33). The term social is rested upon CSP’s ideas that psychological

theory needs to be social and political driven. Lastly, the term *liberatory* comes as it is shown from the stream of liberation psychology which focuses on the liberation of the oppressed. Hence, it is adumbrated how CSP has been linked with CCP under a critical social theoretical orientation, which would not be contextualized if CP's crisis was not taking place, firstly in order to depict the transition from CSP's theory to *praxis* and secondly its limitation in implementing a transformative community *praxis*.

## **Conclusions**

The emergence of CCP is undoubtedly linked with the formation of CSP as a discipline. According to Hepburn (2003) CCP used the term "critical" from both Critical Psychology and CSP. There is a dialectic relationship between CCP and CSP as they share a common critical theoretical, epistemological and methodological background, a critical orientation and character. Nevertheless, CP was the transient state from CSP to CCP.

Adopting CSP's perspective on the critical, epistemological and methodological framework, CP tried to differentiate itself from CSP's 'unpractical' theory, providing community *praxis* out of the deadlock of both mainstream SP and CSP. Therefore CP has been contextualized as a move from critical social theory-crisis to *praxis*. However, the fact that CP has not succeeded to be a unified field, embracing streams which ranged from the individualistic North American CP to the radical CP in Latin America, influenced the way CP implemented community *praxis*.

Many researchers have accused CP for having achieved only a 'partial paradigm shift' insofar to the traditional functioning of psychology. CP's focus on ameliorative change in a very local mostly personal and relational level reveals that

CP has forgotten the social and political dimension of its practice, which was central in its earlier formation and history. Forgetting its community context and emphasizing only personal and relational well-being, an internal disciplinary crisis can therefore be argued. Although CP is undoubtedly contextualized as the move from critical social theory to community *praxis*, it is claimed that CP embraced the transformation and continuation of the crisis from the field of CSP to the field of CP. In other words it is concluded that crisis although it started from SP's asocial theory, *moved to the 'unpractical' CSP's theory* and transformed in community *praxis* crisis. Therefore it can be assumed that CP is in a perpetual crisis in terms of the personal and relational centered *praxis* which forgot the notion of community *praxis* and led to CCP's formation

CCP's emergence reflects upon CP's crisis. Analytically, SP's fail to provide a truly social theory led to the crisis of the field and the flourishing of a critical social theory, radical enough to contextualize daily social incidents, yet unable to provide *praxis* in the daily human problems. CP tried to establish a relationship between critical social theory and *praxis* which has proven very weak, taking into consideration that CP failed to address adequately the concerns of its more marginalized constituents in all levels of change. Therefore, the emergence of CCP and its radical departure from CP can be attributed in CP's *praxis* crisis

CCP tried to redress the relationship between critical social theory and community *praxis*. Rejecting entirely the individualistic historical roots of North American CP, CCP deviated in the long lasting, transformative change embracing all the different levels of well-being, either personal and relational or collective. Hence, it is concluded that CCP not only became another one critical community paradigm but

it should be approached as the outcome of the multiple crises that took place in the disciplines of SP, CSP and CP.

Nevertheless, what should be taken into account is that despite the fact that CCP's emancipation is based on its transformative character, sometimes critical community psychologists made claims for transformative change that has proved at best ameliorative (Kagan et al., 2011, p.32). Therefore, it could be assumed that crisis may not be over. It is possible the following years to observe another interdisciplinary crisis in CCP's domain this time, rested upon the ambiguity of its character aimed transformations.

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