A CULTURE FOR PEACE – AN EXPLOSIVE CONCEPT: AN ATTACHMENT-BASED PSYCHOANALYTIC CRITIQUE OF THE ISRAEL–PALESTINE CONFLICT

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ABSTRACT *This paper looks at how Bowlby's concept of secure and insecure base can illuminate the psychological processes at work in conflicts, taking the Israeli–Palestinian conflict as an example. It ends by suggesting two essential features for co-existence and a culture of peace. Copyright © 2006 John Wiley & Sons, Ltd.*

The game is now who is more and who is less afraid of dying. (Amira Hass, *Ha'aretz*, 6 March 2002)

Attachment-based psychoanalytic psychotherapy can help us understand Hass's question.

Bowlby's Secure Base is a prerequisite for the ability of individuals and groups to relate healthily to one another; conversely, an insecure base may enhance anxiety or dread of annihilation. What are the psychological processes that defend us against that anxiety and fear of annihilation, and how and when do they work against us and become counterproductive? How are they played out in the Israeli–Palestinian conflict? Hass reminds us that dying and killing have paradoxically come to represent liberation from the dread of annihilation: at one and the same time a truly libidinous and self-defeating experience. Libido coincides with Death.

Attachment and intersubjective theory help us to understand our inner perception of the other and the world. Both theories grow out of the social political context which in turn impacts on attachment patterns, intersubjectivity, and what gets fed back into the social political context. These ideas can help us to understand both sides of the Israel–Palestine conflict, not forgetting the

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critical differences in the social contexts, the lack of parity between occupier and occupied. The paper ends by looking at the role of hope in changing the political process; a growing movement of People 2 People (P2P) civil action is diminishing individual and group fear and rehumanising the enemy.

BOWLBY'S CONCEPT OF BASE

During the last century John Bowlby, a British paediatrician and psychoanalyst, developed his then revolutionary but now widely accepted theory of the causality between the type of care an infant has and their subsequent mental health (Holmes, 1993, 84). Based on scientific and clinical observations, Bowlby drew the conclusion that the only primary drive infants have is for proximity and attachment to a carer (usually the mother) who will ensure baby's survival. The parental response to baby's cues for care facilitate a Secure Attachment or an Insecure Attachment depending on the degree of sensitivity to baby's emotional needs. Physical care is not enough. Secure Attachment and bonding promotes mental health; Insecure Attachment is associated with emotional pathology, in particular anxiety and dread of annihilation (Holmes, 1993, 68). 'Attachment behaviour is triggered by separation or threatened separation from the attachment figure'. It leads to behaviour that will seek proximity to a 'differentiated and preferred individual'. Proximity soothes the seeker. Attachment behaviour continues throughout life, and is based on internal models of early internalized relationships.

Our first experience of peace is probably that inner state of well-being and equilibrium resulting from the merged togetherness that infants in a secure emotional attachment experience with their primary carers. The infant is then essentially safe and pro-

tected; her survival needs are consistently anticipated and met. The infant does not experience vulnerability, or dread of annihilation. The infant does experience secure attachment within a Secure Base (Bowlby, 1988, 11).

For the first 6–12 months the securely attached mother and infant remain in close proximity, anxious when not within hearing or sight of one another, gazing, touching, and merged in an exclusive togetherness, split off from the demands of the real world. You may recognize this behaviour between lovers when no one but the lover exists, often referred to as 'paradise' and recognized in poetry and literature as the sickness or madness of love. Psychology and legal systems acknowledge diminished responsibility during these times. National songs and literature, Israeli, Palestinian, and others, often recall that early infant–mother or lover relationship: 'I'm a lover, my Homeland is my beloved' sings Palestinian Amal, or the Israeli song: 'Our country which we love is for us mother and father' (Shaiki Pikov).

TRAUMA AND TRANSITION

The infant's developmental task is to make a transition from the idealized peace of merged fantasy with mother to the real world, where dread lurks around corners. Fantasized omnipotence over mother, and the environment, is shattered when mother gradually distances and unmerges herself as she returns to functions and roles in the real world. This could be experienced as a significant trauma and loss for the vulnerable infant.

Feeling vulnerable and anxious the infant must make a transition to a world now devoid of idealized protection. The success of the transition from fantasy to reality determines the infant's later capacity for integration and healthy mutual dependence.

But in order to make that transition the infant must have internalized a secure base, feel safe, and be safe. She is then free to explore and play; the parents, significant others, and the world become reliable companions to empathically share affiliation needs (in the adult world fraternity) with shared love and hate, fear and vulnerability, joy and sadness, creativity and hope.

AN INSECURE BASE

A less fortunate infant, coping with an Insecure Attachment of unresponsive and insensitive care, is vulnerable with an increased risk of non-survival. Insecurely attached children fall into three categories: avoidant, ambivalent, and disorganized-chaotic. These infants experience pre-symbolic dread of annihilation, a narrative often re-experienced later as real or existential anxiety and vulnerability. The small group of disorganized-chaotic attachment infants who having suffered significant abuse, show confused behaviours, including emotional and physical freezing, distancing themselves from contact with the parent figures, and a lack of spontaneity with stereotyped movements. Children and families in this situation need external care to ensure their survival.

Nations, too, require a secure base, with individual, social, and economic needs met in order to develop a mature interdependence with the environment, co-existence with neighbouring nations and the global order. The terminology of 'motherland' or 'fatherland', 'homeland', 'mother tongue', 'land of milk and honey' are all representations of early idealized mother–infant relationships. A nation's secure base will depend on securely attached leaders who are not only iconic mother/father heroes, but real people able to value human life and dignity, with congruence between personal and public agendas.

Insecurely attached infants and adults will yearn for a safe base, sometimes projecting that yearning into nationalism, or having been denied a safe base, deny the yearning for it. If a nation's base is not secure then the transition to a mature co-existence based on reality and compromise cannot occur, and then for nations, like infants, relating will be through omnipotence and control rather than mutual inter-relating. Many Israelis and Palestinians are, sadly, still struggling with this transitional phase.

Israelis have a collective, centuries-old experience of persecution, homelessness, statelessness, and displacement. In other words: a history of direct or indirect trauma, of gross vulnerability and insecurity – as in Bowlby's disorganized or chaotic attachment. The search for a secure base has been internalized by Jews through prayer, festivals, and culture as yearning to return to the safety of the mother country, Israel. This intergenerational history and narrative is of course now shared by Palestinians.

The challenge for Jews to make the transition to the demands of the real-world mother-country came in 1948, with the State of Israel, the first supposedly Jewish secure base in centuries. But the transition was dogged by trauma and fear of annihilation real or perceived. Not having ever internalized a secure-base paradigm, the twentieth century 'New Jews', who abhorred what they saw as the submission of their fathers to oppression and victimization, nevertheless became caught up in the transgenerational repetitions of historic traumas, re-enacting the narrative of persecution and vulnerability. Indeed, Insecure Attachment patterns pervade Israeli politics. An underlying dread of annihilation is at the basis of Israel's politicization of demography through the fear that the Palestinian birth rate will overtake the Jewish birth rate, and again Jews will find themselves homeless or anni-

hilated, a repetition of the insecurely attached infant's fear of abandonment or rejection by the motherland, and reminiscent of Winnicott's Fear of Breakdown (Winnicott, 1989, 87): the worst has already happened, but the anticipation and dread of it happening in the present persists.

Rather than knowing how to seek out or initiate a secure base homeland and develop a healthy autonomy and interdependency with neighbours, Israelis fell prey to a paranoiac defence in their relationship with Palestinians, while Palestinians experiencing and fearing their own homelessness and fear of annihilation employed the defence of denial and disassociation from Israel. Both peoples, now insecurely attached to their motherland, fear for their survival and are too paralysed by that fear to negotiate their survival. Israelis and Palestinians live in fear of annihilation by the hands of their dehumanized neighbours and are caught up in Benjamin's (1998, 98) ongoing struggle to recognize the real other, rather than the projected hostile monster; through that recognition we can achieve the recognition we yearn for ourselves.

THE SOCIAL CONTEXT

In 2001, the Israeli–Palestinian Committee for Mental Hygiene and Peace, 125 experts in trauma and conflict resolution, handed a Statement to Israeli and Palestinian leaders which noted the history of both sides as fraught with humiliation, betrayal, and expulsion. They marked their concern at:

- the personal and national impact of loss of family members and friends
- the cycle of recurring traumatization involving violence, humiliation, retaliation, and revenge

- the protracted exposure to conditions of uncertainty, anxiety, and stress
- the dehumanization of the other side, viewed as enemy
- the dehumanizing effects on young people of being involved in violence and killing and of participating in or being party to oppression
- the distorted picture of the other side inculcated from a young age into future generations, perpetuating the conflict.

The Statement calls on both governments for:

- personal and public recognition of the harm involved in a policy of retribution
- sincere expression of regret over suffering caused
- denunciation of violence as a means of achieving national goals, and a return to negotiation
- undertaking an initiative regardless of unpleasant political or electoral consequences
- dismantling of the settlements – for Israeli as well as Palestinian well-being.

In July 2006, we see the situation in Gaza and South Lebanon deteriorating into Manenti's (1999) 'psychosocial trauma as inhumanization', his description of nations caught in disorganized-chaotic attachment and exposed to trauma such as that in Bosnia Herzegovnia. Manenti identifies characteristics of the populations as 'the incapacity to think brightly, communicate truth, feel sensibility or suffering of the others . . . ideological rigidity, evasive scepticism, paranoiac defence, hatred and desire for revenge. Insecurity facing one's own destiny, lack of sense in making things, a strong need to belong to a group . . . feelings of vulnerabil-

ity and weakness caused by fear, excessive state of alert, feeling of loss of control over one's own life, alteration of reality sense'. These are the same characteristics found in children caught up in abusive disorganized-chaotic attachment patterns. When trauma results in psychotic states which defy organization of the self so that functioning survival is impossible, outside help is needed, indeed often requested. In the Middle East today, international intervention is urgently needed in order to hold the disorganization and chaos which is paradoxically leading to the feared death and annihilation through the repetitions of escalation and retaliation as defence. To return to Amira Hass's words 'The game is now who is more and who is less afraid of dying'.

PSYCHOLOGICAL DEFENCE PROCESSES: THE ROLE OF DEFENCE MECHANISMS IN POLITICAL CONFLICT – SPLITTING, PROJECTION, AND INTROJECTION

The purpose of psychological defensive reactions is primarily to shield us from unpleasant realities or fantasies and help us cope with otherwise overwhelming experiences which threaten to destroy us. On the whole, defence mechanisms are helpful so that we can maintain a viable and functioning self. At times they become rigid and counterproductive.

So why is it that when people have experienced persecution and suffering they often turn to re-enactment of that suffering rather than to compassion? The answer lies again in the internal and external intolerable experience of vulnerability and dread of annihilation. We defend ourselves against that with the psychological defences of denial, splitting, and projection onto others of what is too intolerable to hold within ourselves. Identification and empathy for another's suffering gets replaced by hatred when love is frustrated, and a demand for love as recognition and preservation of the self from isolation and death, is denied. The dead, split-off, unloveable part of the self is projected onto the other, or turned in on the self with revengeful acts of suicide or killing. Hate and revenge are static rigid emotions. They are self-defeating, seeking fantasized or actual death, not resolution.

The death-seeking process goes something like this. Individual and group responses to vulnerability proceed along an increasingly self and 'other' destructive course. Vulnerability is accompanied by anxious helplessness, hopelessness, and existential loss of trust. The person or group that cannot tolerate vulnerability unconsciously employs the defensive mechanism of a grandiose invulnerable false self with superman and superwoman fantasies, which may be acted out. In reality our vulnerability hasn't disappeared, so we rid ourselves of this uncomfortable fact by projecting the vulnerability onto others so they end up carrying those feelings of fear, helplessness, hopelessness, and loss that we cannot tolerate: as has happened between the Israelis and the Palestinians. We also project our bad feelings about what we are doing onto the person or group we do it to – so they are perceived as 'bad'. And the more our victim refuses to accept those vulnerable parts of ourselves the more we must batter and humiliate them, employing ever more controlling and oppressive measures until we succeed. Splitting off our own intolerable feelings and behaviour now becomes even more urgent as self-disgust at the actions used to terrorize or humiliate the other emerge. Eventually that can only be coped with by denying the pain of our

victim, till we no longer see or hear their humanity.

In turn, those who have been the recipients of the split-off, intolerable feelings and behaviours, will also not be able to tolerate the anxiety of what they now experience as their own vulnerability and will engage in the same process of splitting, denial, and projection either onto a third party or back into the original group. In this way we have seen Israelis and Palestinians perpetuate a cycle of vulnerability, insecurity, fear, and violence. Violence becomes the re-empowering preferred defence against helplessness. These defensive repetitions are, at this stage, wholly counterproductive.

The denial of vulnerability and subsequent omnipotent false self leads to a serious distortion of reality shared by leaders of politics, media, education, and eventually the people, all unconsciously rationalizing unacceptable behaviours and policies. Oppression employed as a defence against the anxiety of insecurity promotes the development of internal authoritarian personality structures, often with disastrous results, the least of which is rigidity of thought and the loss of those life-giving energies of creativity, flexibility, and hope. Addressing academics at Tel Aviv University in 2002, Bill Clinton referred to the refusal to negotiate as 'a retreat from a rational engagement with the issues' (Martin Land, personal communication). Peace and protest activists who challenge belief systems held by leaders and the general population, are often denied, split off and accused of disloyalty and betrayal. They have to cope with hate, revenge, and danger of being ostracized (killed off) from those who cannot tolerate the internal dissonance caused by threats to defensive perceptions and beliefs. Palestinian peace activists were slow to organize for fear of being accused of collaboration; dialoguing with the enemy was seen as normal-

ization, a betrayal by acceptance of the status quo, rather than an alternative route to resolution.

Since writing this paper, there has been a steep escalation in state terror, suicide bombing, loss of life, and chaos resulting in the events of July 2006. The defensive mechanisms for coping with fear (paranoic defence, denial, and disassociation) have distorted reality to the point of disintegration into Manenti's (1999) psychosocial trauma as inhumanization. Indeed, Gaza was declared a humanitarian crisis in 2006. Israel's 2004 policy of unilateral disengagement, and the construction of the separation wall which totally blocks out and denies the existence of those on the other side, together with Hamas' election to power in 2006, with a previous platform of non-recognition and destruction of Israel, represent the ultimate in denial and dehumanization of the other.

Constructive, not unilateral, disengagement based on fraternity (Cohen, 2001, 294) through a viable two-state solution could serve as a flight into emotional health and survival, giving space for each side to re-experience the existence of the other's and their own real self, ridding themselves of destructive defence mechanisms and projections. My title, 'A Culture for Peace: An Explosive Concept', refers to the minefield of repressed, denied, split-off conscious and unconscious feelings, beliefs and processes described above. The far-reaching global social context has fed into these processes, enhancing a climate of fear and thus seriously inhibiting the building of a secure base.

It will take time to negotiate and clear these minefields. People are dying on the way. If our bi-national angst is about fear of annihilation, common sense tells us we have no option but to find a path to survival through sustainable peaceful co-existence.

WHEN LEADERSHIP FAILS TO PROVIDE A SECURE BASE WITH SECURE ATTACHMENT FOR CO-EXISTENCE

Israeli and Palestinian political leadership, the military, and the media are too deeply and rigidly enmeshed in the above psychological processes to offer a creative solution. How often have leaders cynically sacrificed opportunities for negotiation and viable co-existence?

In times of sickness or crisis humans enact attachment behaviour and seek close proximity to parent figures, community leaders, or mother-homeland. Survival is enhanced by the safety of proximity and belonging. However, Israeli and Palestinian leaders who maintain disorganized-chaotic insecure bases perversely threaten rather than protect their citizens' survival. Mollon (2002) shows how we defend ourselves against dread of annihilation with systems of meaning which are no more than illusory representations of the real world. The 'real' is beyond our grasp and a descent into chaos always just around the corner. While some Israelis and Palestinians have resorted to irrational belief systems to defend against their dread of annihilation – beliefs and defences leading to killing, suicide, and death – others have developed beliefs based on non-violence and mutual care. It might be revealing to relate these choices of belief systems to attachment patterns.

Security is the major concern in Israel, but there is little real debate outside of the military sphere. Security has not yet come to mean secure base. During the 1990s the Oslo Accords and Camp David negotiations prefaced a huge reduction of fear of annihilation which opened a mental space for acknowledging the Palestinians as real people, with the possibility of a safe mother-homeland for both peoples – siblings learning to share a motherland. Government funding was available for education and social projects espousing non-violence. After the renewed outbreak of hostilities in 2000 funding was withheld and many projects closed down. Baskin (2001) called on the people of both nations to abandon their political leaders and engage in a people-led, bottom-up policy, initiating uni-national and cross-boundary, decentralized peace-building activities where humanitarian peace action will take precedence over nationalism or religion or land. Baskin's suggestion will lead to a reduction in fear through grassroots politicizing of rehumanization and the growth of hope outside of the control of national political contexts.

The expectation that a person or people who have experienced suffering themselves will identify with the suffering of another is therefore unlikely until the threat and anxiety of their own death and annihilation is removed. There is at this time no effective internal legal process in operation for bringing to justice those perpetuating human rights and war crimes. Indeed, the urgent task for Israelis, whether initiated by Baskin's (2001) 'Bottom-up power' or conventional politics, is to secure a safe base through a proper concern for humanitarian rights and democracy built into a constitution, ensuring all citizens' security.

In their book *Making Terrorism History*, Elworthy and Rifkind's (2006) proposals to transform a society caught up in a cycle of violence through education, social and economic interventions would constitute a secure base.

THE ROLE OF THERAPY

Individual and group psychotherapy can contribute to recovery from trauma and to a secure base by facilitating understanding of what is going on for us internally and externally, past and present. This can free us from

paralysing internal conflict and liberate our energies for creative thought and action to be challenged into personal and political agency, or just into being. By expanding our theory and practice to include Samuel's (1993, 339) political psyche we can make connections between our inner worlds and the social and political context.

Mourning is nature's repair cycle (Bowlby). Can Israelis and Palestinians allow themselves to deal with loss and grief while the violence and oppression continue? Or must they wait until they are no longer overwhelmed with the pain of killing and dying for fear it makes them less effective? Peoples who have survived psychosocial trauma need public as well as personal and cultural rituals for mourning and healing to overcome primary and secondary trauma. Recognition of the trauma and loss with private and/or public apology, following the practice for sexual abuse survivors (Hermann, 1992, 175–195), will offer a space for reflection and for trying to give some meaning to the tragedy. Timing here is an issue. Can this happen while Israelis and Palestinians are still engaged in ongoing political struggle and retraumatization?

Truth and reconciliation commissions may in time provide a public mourning space, but Gillian Slovo (personal communication, 2002) warns that the victim may be exposed to retraumatization within a process where it is not clear that justice is addressed. Slovo suggests that the therapeutic value of truth commissions lies in changing and correcting perceptions of the other, rehumanizing the enemy, which in turn feeds into the political process, thus promoting societal healing. Meantime, informal therapeutic models such as The Compassionate Listening Project may create a safe environment where there is 'trust to express what is deeply troubling' (Green, 1997) and build mutual empathy among people in conflict by telling one another their stories, witnessing each other's pain, and thus restoring a perception of the other as human. Compassionate listening groups are also helpful in the Israeli and Palestinian diaspora, situated mainly in the West, and therefore caught up in a different social context. These diaspora have intense emotional, physical, and economic interaction with their spiritual motherlands. Some seem to adopt more rigid hardline religious and political beliefs than many living in Israel or Palestine, which do not tally with their lifestyle in the diaspora. I understand this as a defence against the threat of loss of their fantasized, idealized mother country; they lack the reassurance that proximity in secure attachment brings. Indeed, what do diaspora Palestinian and Israeli therapists take into the therapy space while we are so mentally and emotionally engaged with our national problems? Dialogue groups and conferences to explore mutual fears, feelings, projections and transference have proved very enlightening.

THE PLACE OF CREATIVITY AND HOPE

At this time of widening destructive hostilities in the Lebanon–Israel war (July 2006) it is critical to engage with and hold creativity and hope as an alternative, non-violent, response to the helplessness and vulnerability.

Hopper's (2001) concept of hope, 'the ability to employ imagination in the face of paralysing trauma is not 'about fudging the real conflicts that face us all, but about the courage to face the conflicts and to exercise our imagination to seek ways to transcend them'.

In the Israel–Palestine conflict, and the wider global context of the politics of fear of the East–West power struggle, reducing fear and rehumanizing the enemy are the two

essential first steps to co-creating a culture of mutual care (fraternity) and co-existence.

'Dissolving burdensome relationships that cause pain' (Davies, 2005, 16) can be extended into individual and group processes and projects that give people an opportunity to experience one another outside of those historic relationships.

This closing section is about the national and bi-national Israeli Palestinian groups who seek peaceful co-existence. Creativity and hope pervade their work, often in the face of criticism and despair.

Interestingly and despite the virtual cessation of government funding since 2001, perhaps as a reaction to the enforced unilateral separation and disruption caused by the separation wall, there has been a proliferation of new P2P organizations, particularly among young people, whose aims are precisely to reduce fear and rehumanize the enemy and themselves. The Peres Centre for Peace and the Israel Palestine Centre for Research and Information (IPCRI) research and document this growth of bottom-up civil society. Their new *Palestine Israel Journal* is testimony to the seriousness with which this development is taken (IPCRI, 2006). Over 100 groups are registered with the newly formed Palestinian Israeli Peace NGO Forum, and there are many which are not registered. A number of young Israelis are introducing an Eastern spiritual dynamic from their 'obligatory' trip to the Far East after their army service (Baskin, personal communication, 2006). Many joint groups, such as the Israeli Palestinian Bereaved Parents' Circle and Family Forum and Taayush, have social action programmes that extend beyond dialoguing and compassionate listening. The words often attributed to Margaret Mead, 'Never doubt that a small group of thoughtful, committed citizens can change the world', may be a rather grandiose defence against helplessness, but the work being done by members of these groups provides a healing social therapy replacing the existing distorted persecutory images of one another with images of fraternity. It is also promoting a sense of agency through civil society activity. In 2001 IPCRI convened an action research forum to evaluate P2P activities. The question was asked whether it was a failure that there is little impact on the political process and the facts on the ground. This misses the main objective of P2P activity, which is to open a space for civil creativity, dialogue, and agency, outside of parliamentary power structures which, during conflict, evoke fear and demonization. Not knowing how long civil action will take to change the perceptions is of course yet another uncertainty perhaps made tolerable by Hopper's hope (*op cit.*).

There is room for the international community to have a role, too, in sustaining hope and creativity. International funding or hosting in a neutral space with third-party adults who care can offer an opportunity for children and adults to be nurtured and temporarily restored. Children and adults who cannot change their situation will know they are not alone.

Women have a special role. We are socialized into peace-keeping roles from childhood. Women therapists are trained to separate out historic neuroses from present reality. We have the skills and the knowledge to bypass national agendas and become active in conflict resolution. Israeli Mothers Against Silence precipitated the protest that brought their sons and partners out of Lebanon in 1982. Betty Williams and Mairead Corrigan won the Nobel Prize for their Declaration of Peace (1976) listing simple, obvious and attainable aims. They also wrote: 'How do we ask for our children's forgiveness, and how can we help heal them?' Women's narratives confront violence with our children's future.

We have subjected our children to horrendous experiences as we alternate between perpetrator and victim roles, which can only result in an ongoing legacy of psychological damage.

I finish with the words of a bereaved Israeli mother to Palestinian and Israeli parents:

> I . . . call all the parents who have not yet lost their children, and all those who are about to, if we don't stand up to the politicians by teaching our children not to follow their murderous ways, if we don't listen to the voice of peace coming from underneath, very soon there will be nothing left to say, nothing left to write or read or listen to except for the perpetual cry of mourning. Please save the children. (Peled-Elhanan, 2001)

This is the task of all responsible people today.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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