

Reparation: A New Dawn or a False Start in Northern Ireland?*

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ABSTRACT *Previous work on the ‘troubled mind of Northern Ireland’ highlighted the effects of the omnipresence of hostility and paranoia in a society exposed to over 30 years of violence. The manifestation of destructiveness has been described using Kleinian theory. This paper presents a new analysis of the state of mind of Northern Ireland following the peace process. The paper suggests, that in Kleinian terminology, Northern Ireland has glimpsed the benefits of the depressive position but much more work needs to be done to make sure we do not regress to the familiar violent experiences of the past. Copyright © 2008 John Wiley & Sons, Ltd.*

Key words: reparation; Northern Ireland; peace process; Klein

INTRODUCTION

The ‘Troubled Mind Project’ over the past 10 years has focused on how Northern Ireland has experienced so much trauma that it has percolated into everyday life (Campbell and Kapur, 1997; Kapur, 2001; Kapur and Campbell, 2004; Kapur, 2005). This destructiveness is manifested by levels of paranoia and hostility that I suggest is absent from a society not exposed to such violence. Indeed, the effects of the troubles in Northern Ireland (Muldoon and Downes, 2007) and of September 11 have corroborated this observation, which is now supported by many empirical studies (for example Schuster et al., 2001, Schlenger et al., 2002). It is now generally accepted that exposure to prolonged periods of violence has negative effects on the mental health of the population (De Jong et al., 2003).

So, in essence, doing bad things to other people leaves bad effects. I have found the best way to conceptualize this phenomenon is through using the ideas contained within Kleinian psychoanalysis – in particular the theoretical postulation that we all move between two states of mind, paranoid-schizoid and depressive or the capacity for concern, depending on the quality of our internal worlds and the impact of external events. My original thesis was advanced in 1997 in the context of Northern Ireland continuing to experience many acts of

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human destructiveness. As a society, we were still witnessing the regular stories of people being killed, maimed or injured by bombs and bullets. As stated in the 2004 text, the 'abnormal became normal', a phrase taken from Victor Frankl's observations of being in a concentration camp.

However, as we all know, things have now changed in Northern Ireland. The peace process has finally delivered a local Assembly with previously sworn enemies now working together on everyday issues that affect the man in the street. Remarkably, one of the major issues that persuaded politicians that the people wanted to be free of sectarian conflict and direct rule was the introduction of water rates! The then Direct Rule Minister, Peter Hain, threatened to send out water rates bills if the Assembly was not agreed by a certain date. So, symbolically, have the rivers of blood turned into reservoirs of water? In other words, has the deadly politics of Ulster been diluted to a more civilized discourse that has replaced the bomb and the bullet with democracy and debate?

In Melanie Klein's work, particularly as espoused through the work of Hanna Segal (1975), the onset of the depressive position, or greater humanization, is characterized by a genuine wish to repair what has been torn asunder. In this paper, I will review this idea of the reparative impulse, drawing on this work and other writers in this field. I will then present a clinical example and political scenarios to illustrate where this phenomena may be occurring to answer the question 'Is Northern Ireland entering a new dawn or a false start in its efforts to create a better future and truly repair the damage of the past?'

THE REPARATIVE URGE

In my paper describing the work after the Omagh bomb (Kapur, 2001) I quote from the work of Hanna Segal:

The pain of mourning experienced in the depressive position and the reparative drives developed to restore the loved internal and external objects, are the basis of creativity and sublimation. The reparative activities are directed towards both the object and the self. They are done partly because of concern for guilt, towards the object and the wish to restore, preserve and give it eternal life; and partly in the interest of self-preservation, now more realistically orientated. The infant's longing to recreate his lost objects gives him the impulse to put together what has been torn asunder, to reconstruct what has been destroyed, to recreate and create. At the same time his wish to spare his objects leads him to sublimate his impulse when they are felt to be destructive. (Segal, 1975, 75)

In this process, there is a clear idea that the individual has done something wrong. There is a moral code that distinguishes between good and bad. This is *crucial* as often people carry out everyday acts of destructiveness thinking and believing that they are justified in their actions. Winnicott (1979) more aptly coined the phrase 'capacity for concern' to signal the onset of the depressive position where there is an idea that harm has been done. At this juncture, when this 'unthinkable thought' (Bion, 1961) has taken place that harm has been done, two forms of guilt can be activated. The more negative reaction is referred to as 'persecutory guilt' whereby the individual blames himself for doing wrong, leaving little or no room for repair. Theoretically, Klein describes this as follows:

If premature guilt is experienced by an ego not yet capable of bearing it, guilt is felt as a persecution and the object that rouses guilt is turned into a persecutor ... The fact that in the earliest state (i.e.

during the paranoid-schizoid position) premature guilt increases persecution and disintegration brings the consequence that the working through of the depressive position also fails. This failure can be observed in both child and adult patients; as soon as guilt is felt, the analyst becomes persecutory and is accused on many grounds. (Klein, 1948, 25–42)

Here it is crucial to consider circumstances where the possibility of persecutory guilt is kept to a minimum as this only creates a vicious cycle of persecution. This vicious circle of persecution is addressed through Strachey's (1934) technical suggestion of a mutative interpretation, to break an internal world of persecution by use of a particular style of interpretation to foster an atmosphere of understanding, particularly in relation to the analyst. He writes:

By virtue of his power as auxiliary superego, the analyst gives permission for a certain small quantity of the patients id-energy (in our instance, in the form of an aggressive impulse) to become conscious. Since the analyst is also, from the nature of things, the object of the patient's id-impulses, the quantity of these impulses which is now released into consciousness will become consciously directed towards the analyst. This is the critical point if all goes well, the patients ego will become aware of the contrast between the aggressive character of his feelings and the real nature of the analyst., who does not behave like the patients 'good' or 'bad' archaic objects. The patient, that is to say, will become aware of a distinction between his archaic phantasy object and the real external object. The interpretation has now become a mutative one, since it has produced a breach in a neurotic vicious circle. For the patient, having become aware of the lack of aggressiveness in the real external object will be less aggressive, and consequently the aggressiveness of his superego will also be diminished. (Strachey, 1934, 282–3)

This is where the skill of the intervention, whether it be in the consulting room or political dialogue is crucial to activate the reparative impulses. Technically, this contains several features as described in my paper with Peter Hobson (Hobson and Kapur, 2005). It has to be:

- anchored in the relationship to the therapist;
- focused on the here-and-now relationship.

Other added features, not described in the above paper are that the intervention has also to be non-persecutory and potentially aimed at increasing the awareness of the patient's destructiveness towards himself and others. This is where reparative guilt emerges. Klein writes:

At this point I wish to consider more specifically the process by which depressive anxiety, guilt and the urge to make reparation come about. The basis of depressive anxiety is, as I described, the process by which the ego synthesizes destructive impulses and feelings of love toward one object. The feeling that harm done to the loved object is caused by the subject's aggressive impulses I take to be the essence of guilt ... The urge to undo or repair this harm results from the feeling that the subject has caused it, i.e. from guilt. The reparative tendency can, therefore, be considered as a consequence of the sense of guilt. (Klein, 1948, 36)

This essential ingredient of reparative guilt is crucial to resolve human conflict. It has to be distinguished from 'guilt-tripping' (Cohen, 2001), which is more about finding comfort

from an often constructed image of poverty so as to appeal for financial help. This often follows the adage of ‘charity should begin at home’, as often people who display this behaviour are often destructive in their own relationships and display what Segal describes as manic reparation:

Manic reparation is a defence in that its aim is to regain the object in such a way that guilt and loss are never experienced. An essential feature of manic reparation is that it has to be done with acknowledgement of guilt, and therefore, under special conditions. For instance, manic reparation is never done in relation to primary objects or internal objects, but always in relation to remote objects; secondly, the object in relation to which reparation is done must never be experienced as having been damaged by oneself; thirdly, the object must be felt as inferior, dependent and, at depth, contemptible. There can be no time, love or esteem for the object or objects that are being repaired, as this would threaten the return of true depressive feelings. (Segal, 1975, 95)

This manic reparation would refer to Cohen’s (2001) idea of guilt tripping. True reparation can only take place where there is clear here-and-now activation of a thought or feeling that harm has been done.

I will now describe a clinical example and political scenario where I explore the difference between a false start (manic reparation) and a new dawn (true reparation).

CLINICAL EXAMPLE

A 36-year-old married, high-flying academic came to see me, presenting with problems of drug addiction and inappropriate sexual liaisons, with which she was increasingly becoming unhappy with. She felt her life was going out of control. In particular, she was unhappy in how she used these short bursts of overexcitement to deal with underlying feelings of inadequacy and worthlessness. I will present an excerpt from one of her sessions:

PT. I was with my boss today and he knows I’m due a regrading but he just refused. In this academic world it’s tough, but I feel I’ve got to prove myself as a woman. I do my work almost perfectly – if anything needs done I do it myself because nobody else can do it as well as me. It’s the same at home; I end up doing all the management of money ... I have to be in control.

T. That you find within yourself an urge to reach for perfection to prove to yourself that you’re good enough. Nothing else will do ... that’s a lot of pressure and maybe leaves you feeling that I can’t do my work properly with you.

PT. I have to stay in charge ... that’s the way it’s always been ... I suppose I do put a lot of pressure on myself to be superwoman and sort things out ... that’s my reputation at the university.

T. I think that’s where it’s also difficult to trust me with the responsibility of having to sort things out – you have always had to do it yourself and I think you are ready to call me and other people stupid if things aren’t done properly.

PT. Yes, I could feel myself wanting to call you stupid for not making me better soon enough ... The great thing about alcohol and sex is that it gives me a quick fix for feeling bad ... but I know these bad feelings have to be dealt with another way ... maybe through developing positive bonds with other people ... my husband, my colleagues.

T. And also a positive bond with yourself ... to try and replace the 'you' that calls you stupid with things that are done perfectly with a you that thinks things are 'good enough' with a kinder relationship to yourself.

ANALYSIS

Ruth Riesenber-Malcolm writes of the role of excitement in her discussion of one of her patients:

In this sense, excitement seems to have been a basic defensive response against the envy experienced at the breast and later towards the parents' intercourse. It seems that for the patient it could be expressed in the following way. 'I am excited and I am alive'. Provided they are excited – analyst, breast, parents – they want me, need me, and that's why they come to get it from me. In the sessions, over and over again I was felt to want to know about her laboratory or flat because of my being excited. Here it can then easily be linked with her promiscuous experience. She felt nothing but arrogant superiority and contempt for her partners because they were the prey of such hot desire and excitement. (Riesenber-Malcolm, 2000, 34)

In my description of this patient's state of mind I refer to her use of sex and drugs as a way of feeling good about herself. This is part of the manic reparation or 'false start' that we often see with patients; they feel better fast but this is generated by pathological solutions that provide only a transient relief from real conflict. One style of managing this dysfunctional behaviour is to confront patients with the errors of their ways and force them to see the negative consequences of their actions. However, in my experience, this only reinforces the persecutory anxiety already experienced by the patient. As stated earlier in respect of Klein's theoretical position on this: 'as soon as [this type] of guilt is felt, the analyst becomes persecutory and is accused on many grounds'. (Klein, 1957, 194–5)

Thus, reparative guilt is not activated by taking a 'moral stance'. Rather, in following Strachey's technical advice of offering a mutative interpretation, my first intervention is aimed at bringing to the patient's awareness her perfectionistic streak which, ultimately, potentially creates a judgement of me not being good enough at my work and potentially being a 'charlatan'. This leads her to elucidate her internal 'superwoman' world and I then suggest that she finds it impossible to trust others as they are contemptible and beneath her; no one can do things better than her.

This intervention is aimed at highlighting the manic defences I refer to earlier where there is a remoteness and distance with others. Again, in the spirit of Strachey's mutative interpretation, I am attempting to break the patient's 'vicious circle' by drawing negative thoughts and feelings towards me through an 'understanding' rather than 'confrontative' response.

At this point, the patient acknowledges the severity of her superego and suggests the possibility of repairing previous bonds ruptured through her hostility. This is the essence of the reparative urge – a realization, often a self-realization created by an atmosphere of thought, that something wrong has taken place. This is where I refer to the 'moral code' held by each of us. For the patient, there emerged an idea that dealing with bad feelings by devaluing others and/or a quick fix of sex and drugs only heralds a false start to real change. As both Klein (1948) and Segal (1975) describe, there has to be a wish to 'reconstruct what

has been torn asunder' and 'undo or repair harm'. For me, this is critical in the onset of genuine reparation, which can signal a new beginning for the patient. This would be similar to Bion's concept of catastrophic change (Lopez-Corvo, 2003) where there is a deep realization that the thoughts and feelings embedded in the mind of the patient have been exposed to an 'emotional earthquake', which, under the influence of a more humane moral code, leads to a positive change of the state of mind of the patient.

POLITICAL SCENARIOS

I will focus on these particular themes in the political atmosphere of Northern Ireland today. In doing so, I will discuss whether the troubled mind of Northern Ireland is moving towards a genuine wish to create a new dawn for a peaceful society.

A 'love in' or a 'work in'

These are phrases that have been used to describe the nature of the relationship between the two major political parties in Northern Ireland: Sinn Fein (SF) and the Democratic Unionist Party (DUP). To see these two sworn enemies working together is indeed a marvellous sight for many people in Northern Ireland who want to see a better future. However, the questions in the minds of many of us here is whether this is an expedient relationship born out of political survival or a genuine working together of two different groups to create a better future?

A key aspect, within Kleinian theory, of the development of a more humane style of relationship is that there is a significant movement from part-object to whole-object relationships. In other words, people are seen as human beings, rather than numbers. I think this first occurred in the response to the Omagh bomb and I described in my paper on the work in Omagh (Kapur, 2001) how, for the first time, a response spontaneously emerged, to set up a psychological treatment service for the victims of the bomb. Before, many tragedies occurred in Northern Ireland without anyone recognizing the human cost of such destructiveness. Also, many political initiatives came and went without any real change taking place to create a new society ready to cooperate. So, in Northern Ireland why is there a potential change now to a more peaceful society?

I think that the voting public became tired of witnessing the horrors of human destructiveness. Nearly everyone in Northern Ireland knows of someone who was killed or maimed by the troubles and this may have activated the reparative impulses in that there exists a genuine wish to 'put together what has been torn asunder'. It may be that this impulse became transmitted to the political leaders who knew that if they did not pay attention to this 'sea change', they would be ignoring their own voters. This democratic mandate has put the two main opposing parties in a new coupling arrangement and it may be that the ordinary work of government, from water rates to the management of foot-and-mouth disease are producing outcomes that are making this a strong working relationship that benefits the whole of society.

Another important factor in the many ingredients to the peace process was the involvement of key political players outside of Northern Ireland. For too long, the 'troubled mind of Northern Ireland' relied on its insularity to promote a destructive narcissism that did not invite outsiders to offer their contribution in a positive way. Furthermore, many external politicians lost interest in the chronic problems of the province. It is here that the contribu-

tions of Tony Blair and Bill Clinton have been positive in providing a serious external contribution from those in power to create a different society. These politicians were able to provide a different perspective to local politicians and their message was often similar – how long can people in Northern Ireland continue to tear each other asunder? This, I think, was an essential ingredient in the reparative process.

Colonial authority or good authority?

Recently the former Head of the Civil Service in Northern Ireland, Sir Kenneth Bloomfield (Bloomfield, 2007) wrote of the errors he felt that the British government presided over, in the abuse of authority, particularly through the ‘establishment’ which led to many injustices taking place, which people felt could only be rectified through violence. This is an example of reparative guilt where a moral code became evoked, albeit many years after the wrongdoings, to repair harm that was done. This example of a new beginning is indeed a sure sign that real changes are taking place in the ‘troubled mind of Northern Ireland’.

However, as stated in my paper in 2005 Kapur (2005) in this journal, there is still much work to be done before organizations such as the Equality and Human Rights Commissions, set up under the Good Friday Agreement, can create a meritocratic society that is a real marker of a democratic society. For many people in Northern Ireland, the Protestant and Catholic lineage of key jobs for each respective religious group still exists. In other words, ‘White Protestant Might is Right’, which also recently, in my experience, has been joined by ‘New White Catholic Might is Right’. For further real change to take place, two processes have to take place to consolidate this new beginning. Firstly, those in authority have to accept that they may have to make way for people on the basis of merit and not on the basis of colonial or other political allegiances. Here, some of the experiences can be taken from South Africa where the white former State President, De Klerk facilitated the assimilation of black people into all areas of government. While this was done under the political pressure of dismantling the apartheid regime, it did have to be facilitated by white leadership so creating a society based on merit and good acts, rather than lineage. Secondly, and related to the first point, merit and good acts have to win through, so giving society an experience that goodness does not reside in the religion or colour of other people but in their actions. In experimental research on prejudice, Wheeler and Fisk (2005) have referred to this as the ‘amygdala effect’. In this research they found that prejudice is not ‘hard wired’ in the amygdala. In other words, if you change the context in which people are seen, judgements can change – so if Catholic, Protestant, black and brown people are seen as professionals or human beings first, rather than belonging to particular groups, this part of the brain reacts positively. Many of these experiences can indeed bring a better society for Northern Ireland based on good deeds.

An important change in the perception of authority and in particular the criminal justice system has also led to the ‘man in the street’ having a better experience of good authority. This has occurred with the reform of the police force, the Royal Ulster Constabulary (RUC), with a change of recruiting processes to ensure 50/50 recruitment among the Protestant and Catholic populations and also a change of name to the Police Service of Northern Ireland (PSNI) following from the Patton Reforms. This, along with the establishment of the Police Ombudsman’s Office which created a vehicle for investigation of complaints and allegations of Police and Special Branch collusion in murders over the course of the troubles,

meant that Nationalists could begin to take part in and possibly begin to trust in authority. The presence of Sinn Fein on Police Boards has been a major change, which has now provided an opportunity for the Catholic community to begin to feel a little safer in the hands of what previously were the enemy. However, much work needs to be done by the PSNI to ensure this is not a false start characterized by the abuses of the past. If this new authority can work effectively then ordinary, good citizens can indeed believe in a good society that can protect them when they are vulnerable.

CONCLUSION

There are undoubtedly strong signs that, in Kleinian terminology, Northern Ireland has seen the first signs of the depressive position. As with any psychic change, there will always be a pull towards the temptation of regressing backwards to violence as a way of achieving an identity and a 'feel-good' factor that is rooted more in sadism rather than a creation of a sane society. However, as stated in other papers on the 'troubled mind of Northern Ireland', it is the responsibility of all of us to take actions and do good deeds that consolidate our less paranoid and more creative society. Otherwise, the terrorist within us all will return with venom and retake its position of 'I haven't gone away you know', in which case it will indeed be a false start. The onus is on all of us to ensure this does not happen.

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