Psychotherapy and Politics International
Psychotherapy and Politics International 13(2), 82–93 (2015)
Published online 8 June 2015 in Wiley Online Library
(wileyonlinelibrary.com) **DOI:** 10.1002/ppi.1349

In the Eye of the Storm: Israeli Psychoanalysis and its Political Surroundings

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ABSTRACT *This paper discusses the historical and political context in which Israeli analysts and therapists practice, particularly emphasizing the Israeli-Arab conflict and its traumatic influence. It proposes a potential role psychoanalytic understanding can play in detoxifying the most destructive aspects of the conflict, especially if non-judgmental empathy to the emotional experience of both sides can lead beyond moralistic splitting into "good" and "evil" and beyond a "doer and done-to" dichotomy. Copyright © 2015 John Wiley & Sons, Ltd.*

Key words: boycott; cumulative trauma; doer and done-to; empathy; holocaust; Israeli–Palestinian conflict; occupation; social protest; terrorism; utopianism

While I was writing the first draft of this paper, in September 2011, I was surrounded by two storms. Rothschild Boulevard, close to my Tel Aviv home, was full of tents. This was a central arena of the mass protest against the rising costs of living and the growing economic gap between a small group of the very rich and the majority of Israel's citizens, many of whom can no longer afford to buy or rent a decent apartment, and barely manage to cover their expenses even if they possess higher education and work hard to make a living. Twice during that period I participated in vigorous demonstrations of over 300,000 people under the slogan "the people want social justice" (this was the Israeli counterpart of the Occupy Wall Street movement). A group of psychologists was prominent in the demonstrations, and psychology interns organized a tent on the Boulevard, demanding affordable psychotherapy for all those who needed it. Psychoanalysts gave talks there almost every night. I dedicated my talk to historical lessons regarding the social context of psychotherapy from "moral treatment", through the psychoanalytic polyclinics in Vienna and Berlin, to the community mental health movement and its mixed record. I subsequently met with the young organizers to discuss the formulation of their demands which were added to a vast reform plan promoted by the initiators of this unexpected protest movement, unknown activists in their twenties and thirties who have become national heroes.

At the same time, that wave of protest was threatened by other events, by a second storm. A terrorist attack near Eilat, at the southern end of the country, claimed several lives. Israel bombarded the Gaza strip in retaliation and several militant groups in Gaza attacked cities and villages in the south of Israel with rockets and missiles. The count of individuals killed or

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wounded, many of them civilians, increased rapidly on both sides. Alas, similar events have repeated themselves on a larger scale since, most dramatically in the summer of 2014. In my view both the Israeli government and the Hammas leadership are reckless in their mutual violence, which is always rationalized as an "unavoidable response" to the opponent's aggression. This is a typical "doer and done-to" pattern (Benjamin, 2004), which unavoidably sabotages any resolution.

POLITICS ENTER THE CONSULTING ROOM

Naturally, these storms appeared in 2011 in my consulting room. One of the members of a psychotherapy group for young therapists which I conduct was also one of the organizers of "the interns' tent"; other members came to hear my talk there or attended a public rally of psychologists held nearby, which I also addressed. As an aside, I opened this address by quoting Freud's (1919/1955) hope that "the conscience of society will awaken and remind it that the poor man should have just as much right to assistance for his mind as he now has to the life-saving help offered by surgery" (p. 167). I contrasted Freud's conservative but conscientious world view with the cynical and narrow-minded conservatism of leaders like Thatcher and Netanyahu who sacrifice the economic and emotional well-being of the majority of citizens in the name of idealized doctrines.

The various contexts in which I and my group members had met each other led to issues of boundaries which were central in the group's meetings. Another patient called to ask for a change in the timing of our session as he wanted to participate in a demonstration of his professional group. Additional patients read my commentary on the protest movement on a psychology website and responded. A patient was worried about his son, a student living in a city hit by missiles. Another was trying to decide whether to attend the traditional Eilat Jazz Festival or to stay at home.

An analysand reported a dream. She is at her home, and a stranger appears. He is very polite, and explains that for her own good she should sell her apartment and move elsewhere because her neighbor is very violent and may hurt her. She senses that, in spite of the polite style and the proclaimed concern, this is a manipulative attempt to drive her out of her home. Her associations led, among other directions, to the instability her parents had experienced in Europe due to political upheavals and to anti-Semitism, and to the anxiety aroused that week by the news of the violent invasion of the Israeli embassy in Cairo. No place is really safe, not even one's home.

Of course, each of these responses was also related to individual dynamics, and it requires time to better understand their deeper significance, which may still be unconscious; but they were also related to reality issues, and I and my patients were clearly co-participants in the same historical, social, and political drama.

Many of us were concerned that the winds of war would silence the social protest, as had often happened in the past, but the two storms were related: one of the clear reasons for the insufficient investment in health, education, and welfare is Israel's enormous security budget. It is unlikely that this budget could or would be increased unless the Israeli–Arab conflict were resolved. Much of the money missing in poorer towns and urban areas in Israel is spent on building settlements in the West Bank, which become a stumbling block to any peace agreement. Taking the social protest out of this historical and political context, as its leaders preferred to do in order to mobilize broader support, was naïve and may have contributed to what appears, in retrospect, to be the failure of the 2011 protest wave. The concept of social justice is still influential in Israeli public

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DOI: 10.1002/ppi

discourse but very little has actually changed since 2011. This is one reason why, whereas I saw the social protest as just and very important, I dedicate most of this paper to the Middle East conflict and its impact on Israeli psychoanalysis.

THE IMPACT OF HISTORY AND OF THE ISRAELI–ARAB CONFLICT

The dilemmas this historical context poses for analysts are not new. The history of psychoanalysis in Israel started in British-ruled Palestine before the state of Israel was established (Rolnik, 2002, 2012), and has been consistently characterized by two opposing trends: firstly, by strong attention to the unique characteristics of the evolving new society, at times culminating in mobilizing psychoanalysis for societal goals while sacrificing some of its radical, critical nature; and, at the other extreme, an attempt to keep its universal intrapsychic purity at the risk of turning a deaf ear to the historical and social context (Berman, 2002, 2006). The first trend was more dominant from the 1930s to the 1950s and was expressed, for example, in the idealistic, but at times naïve, involvement of psychoanalysts in molding educational systems, in the kibbutz movement, and elsewhere. This led at times to utilizing psychoanalytic thought as a rationalization, for example, justifying the communal upbringing of young kibbutz children, mostly motivated by ideological and economic reasons, by the need to spare them the pathogenic Oedipal situation and the primal scene (Berman, 1988). For several decades psychoanalysts also headed most psychiatric hospitals and mental health clinics, and formulated Israel's mental health policy.

The second trend has been more dominant in recent decades as part of the shift of Israeli society in general away from idealistic pioneering concerns, an aspect of the wish for "normalization". A majority of Israeli analysts, and many of the more experienced clinical psychologists and other psychotherapists, work nowadays mostly in private practice, and avoid involvement in the deteriorating mental health system or in the problem-ridden school system. Still, they are often forced to realize that private patients, even if they are relatively affluent, are social creatures too, and are not exempt from the influence of historical and political forces.

This growing, though conflictual, realization accounts, I believe, for the repeated attempts of Israeli analysts and therapists to express their political concerns. However, the inner conflicts aroused and possibly the introverted style of many analysts, their greater comfort in the privacy of their consulting rooms, and embarrassment and worry about exposure may account for a certain instability and discontinuity of these attempts. Still, as I mentioned, many analysts have openly expressed their identification with the 2011 wave of social protest, participating in demonstrations and rallies.

The bloody Israeli–Palestinian conflict and its internal repercussions have been part of our lives for decades. As long as Israel is caught up in a traumatizing cycle of violence, humiliation, and revenge, this historical reality has an unavoidable impact on the professional life of Israeli analysts. It naturally influences our daily clinical work with individuals, as the repeated wars and the constant insecurity constitute a cumulative trauma for many Israelis. This reality raises even more sharply dilemmas regarding analysts' potential contributions to the well-being of their society at large. Should we utilize our unique skills (involving a heightened capacity for empathic listening side by side with recognizing pathological tendencies) to try and protect our society from the trauma and anxiety of war? Can we do so without expressing in an intellectualized form our personal political biases?

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These questions deserve to be examined through a broad historical lens. The involvement of mental-health professionals in Israeli politics has been a continuous topic of debate for the past 50 years (Berman, 2002, 2006). We keep looking into possible options for socially involved analysts, as individual therapists and, possibly, also as contributors to the public sphere. What is at issue are the meeting points and potential clashes of two powerful passions: the psychoanalytic passion for in-depth understanding and for alleviating individual emotional pain, and the political passion for social and historical change which could benefit vast numbers of people. We also need to analyze the common roots of these twin passions in rescue fantasies, which can both empower and sabotage them (Berman, 1997, 2002, 2003, 2006, 2011).

My own point of view is clearly influenced by my personal pre-history and history, first and foremost the involvement of my parents in the Jewish underground in Warsaw, first in the ghetto then on the Aryan side under assumed identities, during the Nazi occupation (Berman, 2010; Temkin-Berman, 1944–1945/2012). Whereas I fit all definitions of "second generation" holocaust survivors' offspring, my experience of my parents was never of passive victims but rather of courageous and thoughtful fighters. Moreover, I grew up under the influence of left-wing ideology, which I see both as an asset (having absorbed values of social justice and a universalistic view of the dangers of xenophobia and oppression) and as a risk (needing to avoid the temptations of over-confident dogmatic trust in absolute truths and of splitting between good and evil). This background contributes to my political interests and to my criticism of both right-wing views, which in Israel often tend towards one-sided nationalism and blindness to the experience and pain of the Arab side, and left-wing views which tend towards utopian pacifist naïveté and disregard of the deep roots of national identifications and fears.

What can we do to help patients whose political views are radically different from our own? Can a Tel Aviv analyst, who is typically opposed to the occupation of Arab territories and supportive of Israeli–Palestinian coexistence in two states, treat a settler from the West Bank or a nationalistic Arab patient who would like to see Israel disappear as a separate state? Aron (2006) described a fascinating case he supervised in 2001 of an individual who identified with the 9/11 terrorist attack. He and his supervisee

> explored to what degree [she] had become fixed in her identification with the victims and the rescuers, thus locking her patient into his reciprocal identifications with the powerful and frightening terrorists. But from the reverse perspective, how much was the patient's being locked into one set of identifications pushing the therapist into identifying with the complementary roles? (p. 350)

Beyond its clinical interest, I quote this episode because I think its discussion is relevant to a broader theme: the crossroads of the political and the psychoanalytic, and more specifically the partially unconscious transferential complications confronting us as analysts when dealing with dramatic political events.

RECLUSIVE, MOBILIZED OR INVOLVED PSYCHOANALYSIS? THREE OPTIONS

Of course, one way of dealing with these complications is to avoid them by remaining strictly apolitical, and to respond only to the patient's internal psychic reality. In my view, paying

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exclusive attention to psychic reality may sabotage our clinical work (Berman, 2001, 2004). "Transitional space breaks down when either inner or outer reality begins to dominate the scene, just as conversation stops if one of the participants takes over" (Phillips, 1988, p. 119). Additionally, this solution, which we might call "reclusive psychoanalysis", contributed to the initial cowardly reaction of the international psychoanalytic community to the rise of Hitler and to the subsequent collaboration of some analysts with the Nazi regime (Berman, 2002). It also legitimized various forms of collaboration with the dictatorships in South America during the last decades of the 20th century.

In any society where political issues are matters of life and death, the analyst's maintenance of strict neutrality and anonymity in political matters is in itself a political position of a certain kind, and one that raises ethical concerns. Moreover, such a position may be experienced by patients as insincere and as untrustworthy, as an aspect of "professional hypocrisy" (Ferenczi, 1933), stifling open analytic discourse. However, the alternative cannot be a domineering moralizing discourse. Respect and tolerance for the patient's opinions and a wish to understand them are crucial. At the same time I agree with Renik (1995) that "an analyst who regards his or her own constructions of reality as no more than personal views to be offered for a patient's consideration has no reason to avoid stating them explicitly" (p. 478). Of course, in Israel, most patients can guess their analyst's views anyway.

Another solution is what we might call "mobilized psychoanalysis": seeking psychoanalytic rationales for preconceived ideological conclusions. This often leads to a sharp division between "us" and "them", whereby "the other side" is portrayed as being characterized by primitive and pathological patterns, such as splitting, projective identification and the like. I believe that many current discussions of "the clash of civilizations" fall into this trap: one side, "them", is portrayed completely from the outside, while the actions of the other side, "us", are taken for granted as unavoidable self-defense, or even glorified.

My hunch is that such splits are often related to a rigid adoption of a rescue fantasy in which there is a total separation between the roles of the endangered beauty (helpless people to be protected and saved), the beastly dragon (the terrorist, or in an opposite version the post-colonialist oppressor), and the courageous, pure-hearted knight ("our" security forces or "our" freedom fighters). Such divisions often characterize utopian beliefs which can be understood as generalized rescue fantasies. Such beliefs may appear on both sides of the fence, so that the same group can be viewed as terrorists or as freedom fighters, and the other group may be seen as protectors or as oppressors; the roles of the dragon and of the knight can be easily reversed, but in each perspective they are strictly separated. Of course, the deeper emotional reality is that these roles are always much more mixed. Every knight may eventually turn into a dragon as I attempted to portray through an analysis of Hitchcock's film *Vertigo* (Berman, 1997). Working through our transferential fantasies about political reality is therefore crucial if we wish to understand it better.

Even defining what is at issue may already express a transferential bias. Defining "terrorism" as the main issue confronting a society is in itself a political position. It points to a certain value orientation, which we could name "mainstream Western", that stigmatizes the motivations of its opponents. An opposite value orientation, which could be defined as "radical", would often focus on issues such as post-colonialism, exploitation, and globalization. In this discourse the violence of terrorism may be denied or marginalized. Both value orientations may put certain aspects of reality in sharp focus while other aspects remain in the shadow, leading to a rather selective psychoanalytic interpretation of reality. In Israel, for example, individuals who see terrorism as

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the main issue are typically government supporters. Supporters of the Palestinian side define the occupation as the main issue. I would argue that the main issue is the protracted national conflict which gives rise to both terrorism and to the occupation as twin, mutually enhancing disastrous outcomes.

What, however, could be a path towards avoiding the extreme positions of being avoidant and reclusive, or being mobilized by one side in a conflict? I would call it "involved psychoanalysis" (Berman, 2002). I see it as expressing a commitment to basic human values without becoming tied to specific political positions; and as striving to listen attentively and empathically to all those involved in historical conflicts, even if we view them as tragically misguided. Empathy does not mean approval and does not imply having no moral values, but it does require trying to understand "from within" while working through our unavoidable value-based judgments and transference identifications. I believe that when such fuller understanding becomes possible, it can contribute more to detoxifying violence than taking moralistic positions.

Only such listening, I suggest, can free us from looking for the "real nature" and "real motives" of individuals or of groups, and allow us instead to see how complex are the motivations and needs of each side in a conflict, and how much their inner balance could fluctuate. Such understanding helps us figure out how a series of mutual subjective perceptions and experiences could lead to a gradual strengthening of pragmatic considerations and a willingness to compromise (as in the examples of South Africa, Northern Ireland, and the former Yugoslavia, although none of these historical conflicts is fully resolved); or, on the contrary, to an escalation of violence as in the present tragic phase of the Israeli–Palestinian conflict.

ON SPLITTING AND A PARANOID-SCHIZOID CLIMATE IN POLITICS AND IN PERSONAL LIFE

Let me relate a personal experience. A few years ago, the Israeli–Palestinian conflict came up in an Internet-based international discussion group of psychoanalysts. Although political topics were not part of the group's declared agenda, this theme got many members so intensely involved that they sent numerous long messages, attached many documents to support their views, and got into fierce arguments with colleagues who expressed opposing opinions.

I found this discussion very upsetting. This may seem surprising: as an Israeli analyst quite interested in political issues, I could be expected to feel moved and maybe even grateful for the problems of my region receiving such close attention. However, the reason I experienced the debate as painful (to the point of eventually making an effort to bring it to an end, with a message which I dramatically entitled "S.O.S.") was that I found myself in deep disagreement with over 90% of the communications sent. They were roughly divided into pro-Israeli messages, which often embraced in the most simplistic manner the deceptive propaganda of my own government, and pro-Arab messages, which often enthusiastically quoted hostile anti-Israeli propaganda. The latter also supported the drive for boycotting Israeli universities and academics, which actually triggered the debate in the first place.

I should add that I view the attempted boycott as a tragically misguided step. The Israeli academic community is one of most critical, independent, and anti-chauvinistic segments of Israeli society. This community, and the literary and artistic community as well, are often the source of peace initiatives, of collaborative projects with Palestinian and other Arab scholars and creative artists, and of protests against discrimination against Arab citizens and the

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harassment of civilians in the occupied Palestinian territories. Israeli right wing governments often try to interfere with academic and artistic freedom, and are threatened by the opposition to their policies expressed by intellectuals and by artists. The boycott initiatives are seen by most of us in the Israeli academic left as backstabbing by our colleagues in abroad, whom we expect to be our allies in striving for peaceful solutions based on respecting the rights and needs of Israelis and Palestinians alike.

Returning to the debate I described, most participants, all quite sophisticated intellectuals, dealt with the crisis through splitting, blaming and projection, by choosing "good guys" versus "bad guys", and by contrasting "doer" and "done to" (Benjamin, 2004). The climate that emerged was clearly a "schizoid-paranoid" climate, with very few "depressive" qualities, and therefore with no hope for any reparation.

It so happened that around the same time one of my analysands was undergoing a major crisis in his marriage. This patient too responded to the situation along intense paranoid-schizoid lines, and the similarity of themes became striking for me. The mutual demonization of Arabs and Israelis (echoed by their one-sided supporters) was paralleled in my analysand's discourse, as well as in his accounts of his wife's accusations. For my analysand, his wife became a monster, a vicious creature determined to destroy him, a manipulator who has deceived him all along; and I sensed that his wife saw him in a parallel way.

I must say, and this was certainly an aspect of my countertransference, that in my own experience neither my patient nor his wife was an inherently destructive person. Both grew up with very unempathic and self-absorbed parents, both were painfully vulnerable, and while their initial bond signified a mutual attempt to console and support each other, in their subsequent life together each became for the other a representation of the disappointing parent. However, even the gentlest attempts on my part to help my analysand develop a fuller perspective on the gradual deterioration of his marriage, involving some understanding of his wife's experience, were rebuffed by him.

Why was I trying to help my patient understand his wife's experience, or, more generally, the experience of the other? To answer this question, I must say a few words about my goals as an analyst (Berman, 2001). The quality of self-other relations (or, if you wish, of the way internal object relations are played out in the actual interpersonal world) appears to me to be a major determinant in shaping people's lives; in making them happy or miserable.

Numerous ideas have been put forward describing variations in the quality of self–other relations. Klein (1975) spoke of a transition from part objects to whole objects, from a schizoid-paranoid experience of objects to a depressive experience, and from magic (projective) reparation to realistic (empathic) reparation. Winnicott (1969) described a shift from object relating to object usage. Kohut (1977) emphasized an evolution from archaic selfobjects toward mature ones, which some later Kohutian authors extended to the idea of moving from experiencing the vital other as a selfobject to a capacity to relate to the other as a selfsubject, allowing mutual understanding and support (Tonnesvang, 2002). In recent intersubjective literature a central notion is the transition from objects to subjects (see, for instance, Benjamin, 1995). In all these divergent formulations, the more mature form of relating involves a greater capacity for recognition of the other's uniqueness, and consequently truer mutuality.

Ogden (1989) spoke in this context of a "depressive" capacity for historicity in which processes can be explored. In the context of such historicity, an object relationship can be understood as going through mutually determined transformations. For example, the dead-end rhetorical

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question “How could I have married such a monster?” (that was indeed central for the patient I just mentioned, who felt he had married his wife because he had been blind as to who she “really was”) may be gradually replaced by a painfully real question: “What went wrong in our relationship so that we became monstrous toward each other, and lost the good things that brought us together initially?”

To give another example, a preoccupation with who you want your child to be (potentially leading to disappointment about the child’s failure to comply with this yearned-for image) may be replaced by greater curiosity about the child’s actual personality and the way it influences, and is influenced by, your evolving relationship with the child. To address such topics, listening to the other becomes a necessity.

LISTENING AND REFUSING TO LISTEN TO THE OTHER’S POINT OF VIEW

When such listening is impossible, the other’s point of view may often be distorted through projective mechanisms and scapegoating, dismissed out of self-righteousness (“What she says about me is crazy, manipulative, insincere”), anxiously disregarded due to an equation between recognition and submission (“If I understand her too much, I’ll have to succumb to her domineering wishes”), cast aside in a climate of entitlement, or otherwise discounted.

Changes in such patterns (which, again, all appeared in the analysis I mentioned), naturally have enormous potential consequences for the other, whose point of view can be better recognized and taken into account. A dialogue thus becomes more achievable. In a marital crisis, this may lead to finding a way to live together better or to a civilized or even amicable separation. In either case it prevents the escalating mutual destruction of a domestic battlefield, or the lethal vindictive divorce proceedings in the style depicted in the film *The War of the Roses* (Brooks, Milchan, & DeVito, 1989). In the final scene of that frightening black comedy both spouses find their death. Bad marriages and hostile divorces are more often lethal emotionally; the Israeli–Palestinian conflict has become lethal both physically (for thousands of victims of violence and terrorism, most of them unarmed civilians) and emotionally (for the two nations as a whole). This raises the question: how can we, as psychoanalysts, make even a modest contribution to detoxifying it? One clear point is that if we are dragged into blaming and into judgmental anger, if we become too identified with one side and turn a deaf ear to the experiences of the other, then we are part of the problem, not part of the solution.

As I described, the international psychoanalytic and intellectual community is evidently prone to taking sides: either through the mainstream rhetoric of “fighting terrorism”, in which the Palestinian side is delegitimized; or through the radical rhetoric of “post-colonialist oppression”, in which the Israeli side is delegitimized. Paradoxically, the views of analysts and therapists more personally involved in this tragic scene are often more subtle (Berman, 2002, 2006). Many Palestinian intellectuals, such as those involved in the Oslo process of the 1990s or in the Geneva accords a few years later, transcend splitting, and attempt to move out of the victim identity, while searching for the “historicity” Ogden (1989) described.

Among Israeli analysts, therapists, university professors and similar groups, a very dominant view (beyond many subtle differences and specific political disagreements) is that the legitimate needs of both sides must be met, but that the means pursued by the political leaderships of both sides to meet these needs have contributed to the present tragedy. In other words, the opinions I present here, although their specific formulation is my sole responsibility, are far from being

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exceptional in my own Israeli milieu. As I describe in detail elsewhere (Berman, 2002, 2006), in the past three decades numerous initiatives have been made by Israeli analysts and therapists in support of a solution which would take into account both Israeli and Palestinian rights and sensitivities, and put an end to the occupation, which many of us see as immoral, corrupting, and destructive to the fundamental fabric of Israeli society.

Throughout the last hundred years, Israeli society has been sharply divided in its attitude towards the Palestinians. The mainstream initially tended to deny the conflict, often rationalizing that denial by emphasizing the benefits of Western culture, imported to the Middle East by the Jews, for the Palestinians. This was the utopian belief that Theodore Herzl, the founder of Zionism, expressed in his novel *Altneuland* [Old-newland] (Herzl, 1902/1987) The right wing was more realistic in recognizing the conflict, but wanted to win it by forceful military means; this eventually became the line of many Israeli governments. Significant groupings, especially of intellectuals such as Yehuda Magnes, the founder of the Hebrew University of Jerusalem, Martin Buber, etc., and of left-wing activists, believed in negotiating a compromise, based on attempting to listen to both the Jewish and Arab points of view.

Alongside the continued bloodshed, this search for dialogue is slowly gaining strength. When the Palestinian territories were occupied by Israel, as a result of the 1967 war, my belief (as a soldier and a young student) in striving to end the occupation, and in establishing a Palestinian state, was shared by a small, marginal minority. Today such views are expressed by roughly half of the Jewish population in Israel, but their political implementation is still not easy.

We all know how in a warring couple various incidents become the ultimate proof of the other partner's responsibility for the crisis. Indeed, every such incident seen in isolation can show blame: X really hit Y at one point; Y really cursed X viciously at another point. Within a paranoid-schizoid context, each such episode is seen in isolation, and is taken as showing the "true nature" of the blamed person; namely, the interpretation is essentialistic, ahistorical, and blind to mutual influence. "The recovery of subjectivity requires the recognition of our own participation," wrote Benjamin (2004, p. 11); but in an impasse, one's own violence is always explained as merely reactive, and rationalized with expressions such as "What else could I have done?" and "Not to respond to this would mean I had succumbed and let him/her have his/her way."

There are parallels to this pattern in political life, and specifically in the Israeli–Palestinian conflict. Naive supporters of each side always see its policies as unavoidable reactions: the other side left "my" side no choice. A sharp focus on any single element of the complex history (replete with mutual aggression) and of the multifaceted situation makes the "doer–done to" division easier. As I said, a sharp focus on the occupation of the Palestinian lands by Israel helps turn it into the "real" aggressor; while a sharp focus on terrorism and suicide bombers makes the Palestinians into the ultimate "bad guys".

Whereas I am utterly opposed both to the Israeli occupation (and to the harsh oppression it unavoidably leads to) and to Palestinian terrorism (in which I include firing missiles into civilian areas), I believe that both phenomena are psychologically understandable as outcomes of fear, rage, and vengefulness, and neither the occupation (with all its subsequent gross injustices and humiliations towards the Palestinians) nor the armed Intifada (which has so often turned its weapons against the innocent) are the result of arbitrary, meaningless viciousness. Nevertheless, both of these policies perpetuate the violent conflict rather than solve it, and are therefore ultimately destructive to both sides.

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THE MEANING AND PLACE OF EMPATHY

As a psychoanalyst, I wish to understand empathically all human behavior, and believe that such understanding is a springboard for its potential change. Empathy does not mean approval. I would never approve of murder or rape, but if I were to treat a murderer or a rapist with the hope of making them less dangerous I would have to mobilize my capacity for empathic understanding, and do my best to figure out what in that person's history and inner dynamics led them towards such horrible solutions. This does not mean that I object to dealing with violent crimes through the criminal justice system; just that as an analyst I can offer an additional, unique vantage point which, in the long run, can also help reduce crime.

Similarly, while I think that Israeli soldiers or settlers who shoot unarmed children or adults should be put on trial, I feel the need to understand empathically what in their experience of the present situation, including their genuine fear that their homeland is in danger, made them lose or at least loosen their moral standards; and while I support punishment of anyone who recruits murderous suicide bombers or sends rockets that may kill innocent civilians, I also wish to understand empathically their deeper motives, including their honest belief that this is the only way to bring freedom to their oppressed people.

I think many of the leaders of both nations have often made fatal mistakes. However, in trying to decipher key moments in the escalation of the conflict I must again use my analytic capacity for empathic understanding. Too often events are explored with a focus on contents alone (for example, what specific propositions were made by each side), without sufficient attention to the psychological dimension; to issues of trust, genuine understanding of the other side, sensitivity to the other side's needs and vulnerabilities, and the frequent lack of such capacities.

When the vulnerability, anxiety, and suspicion of both sides is so high, an ability to remain patient and tactful may be crucial in building trust. To say that the refusal of Palestinian leaders to accept some Israeli proposals "proves their real intentions", or that Israeli rejection of various attempts to mediate "proves that it really doesn't want peace", suggests essentialism, assuming that people, or nations, have "real motives, real natures" which they hide behind a facade. My own guess is that both sides in this bloody conflict wish for peace and also fear it, are torn between vengeful rage and a yearning for tranquility, and that the balance between these contrasting wishes depends a lot on their leaderships.

At many points, central leaders on both sides have intensified the conflict by presenting extreme demands, rejecting the legitimacy of the other side ("there is no Palestinian nation", "Zionism is racism" etc.), promising their nations victory through the use of brutal force: state force, which can deteriorate into state terrorism, or violent defiance, which can deteriorate into terrorism against civilians. Nowadays, such leaders may pay lip service to the wish for peace, but they define a peaceful solution in terms that signify total domination by one side, at best giving individuals of the other side personal rights, but no political national rights. Such proposed solutions for "a really just peace" are actually a formula for continued bloodshed.

What leadership could do better? I do not believe in a pacifistic, anti-nationalist leadership; it is doomed to fail. Actually, a major weakness of many peace movements is their pacifism; namely, their utopian tendency to deny group loyalties and aggression as basic human realities, and to appeal to an idealized peace-loving humanity free of any dividing forces (Berman, 2002). Such idealizations, based on a narrative of progress (from national or religious loyalties towards internationalism), which postmodern thinking has exposed for its wishful thinking, may become

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an obstacle to realistic peace-making. The latter must be based on full awareness of the power of national, ethnic, and religious belonging, and of the universal tendencies to fear and distrust the other.

For me, fighting chauvinism is aided by fully understanding its emotional dynamics; and only empathy towards national sentiments can facilitate their detoxification from murderous hostility so that pragmatic compromises can be reached. This is parallel, to some extent, to the way an analyst can absorb toxic projective identifications, and return them to the analysand in a detoxified version, a process Bion and Ogden describe as crucial for achieving change (Ogden, 1982). One can think of leaders on both sides who were experienced by their people as loyal to their national identifications, wishes, and sentiments, and, at the same time helped detoxify these wishes of their fanatic, hostile, lethal components. Leaders who come to mind are the former Israeli prime minister Yitzhak Rabin, who paid with his life for this attempt, and the present Palestinian president Mahmoud Abbas. One example is Rabin's spontaneous comment, before meeting Arafat in Camp David, that shaking Arafat's hand will give him belly ache; left-wing Israelis did not like this comment, but for many mainstream Israelis it made the hand shake, and the recognition of the Palestinian Liberation Organization after years of fierce struggle with it, more acceptable.

Ideological peace movements often develop a rationalistic, condescending attitude towards nationalistic reactions, and reject common human affects (the wish to avenge crimes, for example) as base, primitive and "irrational". Such a judgmental style antagonizes people, makes them treat the supporters of peace as alien, and does not allow healing processes to evolve. Empathic listening, even to a violent patient, may be more effective in eventually calming down the violence than moral condemnation.

Listening empathically to the individuals on both sides of a bloody dispute does not imply agreeing with their opinions, which may be extreme and rigid, especially when historical rights are at issue and each side has an experience of victimization based on a frightful history of past atrocities. Victimization may be both by the present enemy (and surely many acts of violence were performed by both sides in the Middle East conflict) and by past enemies. Arabs often experience themselves as long-term victims of the colonizing West. Israelis are strongly influenced by the memory of the holocaust. For some the holocaust serves as a warning of what may happen if we reduce our reliance on military force. In some extreme cases, Arafat has been presented as a new Hitler. For others, it is a reminder about the universal dangers of brutality and hate, and also about the risk of victims becoming victimizers. As the son of holocaust survivors, the latter element was central in my upbringing.

Listening empathically to all those involved in a violent conflict implies a realization that, unless the yearnings and anxieties of both sides are sufficiently attended to, no lasting peace is possible. Analysts are equipped to offer a model of such patient and insightful listening if they are able to resolve any biases and transference fantasies that stand in their way.

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DOI: 10.1002/ppi

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DOI: 10.1002/ppi