

# Controversial Discussion on “Israel/Palestine: Roadblocks to Negotiation” by Paul Solomon

## Abstract

This paper offers a controversial discussion between Paul Solomon and Sheri Oz on the former's article, titled “Israel/Palestine: Roadblocks to Negotiation”. The authors examine the political, social and psychological factors preventing peace between Palestinians and Israelis, and discuss how psychoanalytic and group analytic thinking can help us understand the persistence of the Israel-Palestine conflict and conceive new ways to resolve it. After a brief introduction by the editor of this Section, which places the discussion in context and outlines its main themes and the authors' standpoints, Oz acknowledges her own personal biases and focuses on what she describes as “data” and “facts” in criticising the references, foundations, assertions and proposals of Solomon's article. Solomon replies by emphasising Oz's rightwing political stance, and the way it influences how she frames, interprets and considers facts. The disagreement between Oz and Solomon reveals contradictions between the right-wing and the left-wing Israeli accounts of the Israel-Palestine conflict, between the focus on “facts” and the emphasis on frames, representations and narratives, and between pessimism and optimism regarding the role of society and the utility of psychotherapy and psychoanalysis in achieving peace.

## 1 | INTRODUCTION - DAVID PAVÓN-CUÉLLAR

This controversial discussion revolves around Paul Solomon's article, titled “Israel/Palestine: Roadblocks to Negotiation”, which was published at the end of January 2018 in *Psychotherapy and Politics International* (Solomon, 2018). In his article, Solomon utilised psychoanalytic and group analytic theory to shed light on the factors preventing dialogue, negotiation and peace between Palestinians and Israelis. These factors are: 1) the blindness of Israelis to the suffering of the Palestinians and their oppression by the Israeli army and bureaucracy; 2) the fact that the Israeli government inhabits a “soldier's matrix” that legitimates murderous violence and arouses schizoid-paranoid processes and unconscious defences against feelings of guilt, shame or empathy for the enemy's suffering; and 3) the Palestinian leadership's irredentism and refusal to enter negotiation and accept Israel's existence. Solomon gave examples of fear, hatred and paranoia in both Israel and Palestine, but he also recalled the existence of those who transcend the conditioning of their own group, respect the otherness of the other group and understand that Palestinians and Israelis are interdependent. Solomon himself recognised the equal rights of both sides of the conflict, and expressed his belief that “peace can come only from respectful negotiation, and not by continuing the current Israeli Jewish military domination, and ongoing violent resistance by the less powerful Palestinian Arabs” (p. 2).

One month after its publication, Solomon's article was criticised by Sheri Oz (2018a, 2018b, 2018c), between February and March 2018, in three blog entries titled “Group Psychoanalysis for Israeli Jews and Palestinian Arabs”. The main arguments of these entries can be found below, in the first section, in which Oz recognises her own personal biases and right-wing stance, but seeks or pretends to seek to remain objective and thus focuses on what she describes as “data” and “facts” while criticising the references, foundations, assertions and proposals of Solomon's article. Oz disdains the role of society and the utility of psychotherapy and psychoanalysis in achieving peace. She rejects Solomon's

ideas of the blindness of Israelis and the “soldier's matrix” of Israel's government. She also refuses to recognise the equal rights of Israelis and Palestinians, asserting that “Palestinian Arabs do not have equal claim to the land” of Israel because, according to her, they only have “long-term residency rights” and not “indigenous rights”.

The final section of the discussion is composed of Solomon's reply to Oz's arguments. This reply emphasizes Oz's right-wing political stance, and the way it influences how she considers, describes and interprets facts. Solomon also criticises, in general, the widespread framing that overlooks, justifies or normalises the violence of the Western oppressors while pathologizing the violence of the Third World oppressed people, characterising them as fundamentalist terrorists.

What is most striking in the discussion is the way that Oz exemplifies the factors Solomon identifies as roadblocks to dialogue and negotiation between Israelis and Palestinians. However, since Oz discards these factors, she would not accept the idea that her own attitude is part of the problem. And maybe she is right, but maybe not. It's the same with Solomon when he conceives those factors as obstacles to peace. The disagreement between Oz and Solomon is epistemological, ideological and political. It reveals deep contradictions between the positivist focus on “facts” and the post-positivist emphasis on frames and narratives, between pessimism and optimism regarding the role of society and the utility of psychotherapy and psychoanalysis in achieving peace, and between the nationalistic right-wing and the tolerant left-wing Israeli accounts of the Israel-Palestine conflict.

The irreducible political contradiction between Oz and Solomon could also be an insurmountable obstacle to peace. The openly pro-Israel political position of Oz cannot be reconciled with the rather neutral position of Solomon. It is also irreconcilable with the Palestinian and pro-Palestine standpoint, which is revealingly absent from this discussion. This silence should not be discounted. It is as meaningful as the words of those who intervene in the discussion.

## 2 | RESPONSE TO “ISRAEL/PALESTINE: ROADBLOCKS TO NEGOTIATION”, BY PAUL SOLOMON - SHERI OZ

### 2.1 | Case conceptualization

I appreciate the opportunity to respond to Paul Solomon's paper (2018) within the pages of *Psychotherapy and Politics International*. Psychoanalytic analyses of the Israel/Palestine conflict and suggested avenues of resolution have been the subject of academic papers for many years (see, for example, Hollander & Portuges, 2011 on their work group). I offer my commentary as providing a different perspective from the one that is generally presented. Since there is much in Solomon's paper with which I take issue, a complete analysis is beyond the scope of a commentary; therefore, I will not look so much into the details he presents, but rather, provide a more encompassing engagement with his paper. This response is divided into five major sections: the goals of Solomon's paper, my own biases, the facts presented, an analysis of the situation and my conclusions.

Reflection on Solomon's work led me to two conclusions. First, more consideration in psychoanalytic examinations of the conflict should be dedicated to historical fact finding as well as attending to narratives. This can be compared to the intake process in clinical practice that precedes diagnosis and treatment planning. Other aspects commonly assessed for new clients, such as motivation for change, should be part of the conceptualisation when mental health practitioners examine the Israeli/Palestinian Arab conflict. Second, there has to be a clear distinction between analysis of roadblocks to peacemaking (the realm of the political leaders who are charged with conducting the negotiations) and peacebuilding (which concerns the affected populations following successful negotiations).

### 2.2 | The goals of Solomon's paper

First, Solomon refreshingly makes his personal bias clear to readers—refreshing because it so rarely happens. Then he states his purpose: “I intend to review thinking from various disciplines about the conflict in the hope that those

interested will join a conversation" (p. 1). He adds that he knows he is naïve and hopes to learn from "concerned others." I appreciate Solomon's humility and his invitation to a conversation. This means that his second goal was achieved. But did he achieve his first goal: to review thinking from various disciplines?

To answer that, let us look at his reference list. Out of 27 references, 16 are related to psychoanalysis or psychological themes, either books or papers in scholarly psychoanalytic journals. This does not yet support his goal of reviewing "thinking from various disciplines." Do the other 11 sources fulfil this purpose?

Of these 11, one provides a Talmudic quote, one is (leftist) novelist Amos Oz, two are news media (Haaretz and the BBC—generally biased against Israel), one is a book written by an activist organisation (Breaking the Silence) that is viewed by the bulk of their fellow Israelis, and not only by the establishment, as twisting the truth if not blatantly telling lies, and one is a pro-Israeli website (Palwatch) bringing to the public what Palestinian Arabs say in Arabic as opposed to what they say in English. The other five sources cite academic professionals.

Only the academic writers can qualify as representing "various disciplines." They include a Jewish philosopher (Martin Buber), an Israeli political scientist (Raphael Cohen-Almagor), an American historian now living in Israel (Richard Landes), an Arab-American literature professor (Edward Said) and the difficult to classify Stephen Sheehi. Buber's book (*I and Thou*) has served as inspiration for the psychoanalytic analysis of the Israel–Arab/Palestinian conflict, namely, the ability to perceive the enemy as a subject in his or her own right and not merely an object (of fear or hate). Therefore, one can say that his work is a bridge between philosophy and psychoanalysis.

Since its publication, Said's book, *Orientalism*, has been both very influential and very controversial. One could perhaps call this a work of anthropology; together with Sheehi's book on Arab identity, it forms a bridge between Arab (not specifically Palestinian) culture and psychology.

Political scientist Cohen-Almagor presents a somewhat balanced picture of what happened at Oslo and the follow-up attempts to reach a final peace agreement. However, he provides the story only up to 2011 (his work was published in 2012). Between then and now a lot has happened, (after all, on page 1, Solomon contends that "the situation in Israel/Palestine changes daily") and for a paper published in 2018 more recent works by political scientists should have been included. For example, Solomon could have referred to O'Malley (2017) or Yaalon (2017), both likely available before his paper was published, or to Asseburg and Busse (2016); they discussed opposing views of what needs to be done now in light of the apparent failure of the Oslo Accords. Given the complexities of the issues, writers taking on the task of offering ways out of the seemingly intractable conflict are advised to read opposing views in order to prevent themselves from remaining stuck in the two-state solution. Other options are beginning to be considered by historians, policy makers and political scientists, such as the Emirates Solution as proposed by Professor Mordechai Kedar (Wexler, n.d.).

In summary, then, it appears that Solomon only scantily succeeds in providing a multidisciplinary treatment of the conflict between Israel and the Palestinian Arabs.

### 2.3 | My personal biases

I am left-of-centre economically, meaning that I believe in a degree of state responsibility for the welfare of its citizens, and right-of-centre politically, meaning that I believe in Israeli nationalism, in Israel as the Jewish state, in a degree of Jewish religious law and tradition shaping our public spaces. I used to support, in no uncertain terms, the establishment of a Palestinian state on our borders even though there had never before been an Arab Palestine. History has shown that nations rise and nations disappear, and if there is a new nation that wants to call itself Palestine, who am I to object! Or so I once thought.

However, after Israel pulled every last Jew from Gaza (Israel Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2005), offering Gaza a new harbour and a new airport, open borders and a safe land-bridge to Judea and Samaria (a.k.a. the West Bank), and even though Israel continues to allow passage from Israel to Gaza of hundreds of tons of food, medicines and other essentials daily, it got a war of attrition with Hamas in return. As a result, I gradually moved from being a dove to being a hawk. I still believe the Palestinian Arabs have the right to self-define, but they do not have the right to delete Israel from the map—this is their stated goal, and Solomon and those he quotes acknowledge this (pages 5–6 of his article).

Unlike many on the right side of the political spectrum, I do not regard those who think Israel should continue to offer painful concessions to the Arab Palestinians as self-hating Jews or necessarily anti-Semitic non-Jews. They may be, but it is not for me to say. I know that many who are on the left of the political map love Israel and want her to survive, and they truly believe that appeasement (what they call painful compromise) is to Israel's benefit. And we can debate the topic respectfully and fruitfully under one condition: that we agree on the basic facts—not opinion, facts.

## 2.4 | Factual foundations upon which Solomon bases his discussion

Facts include census data, dates, migration patterns, signed international agreements as opposed to those that have the status of recommendations alone, etc. I have been told by some of those who continue to support the two-state solution that facts do not matter—narratives matter. As a psychotherapist, I know that narratives do not necessarily match objective historical events or processes and I also know that even if the “truth” is never known, our clients can still overcome the sometimes overwhelming effects of such histories.

However, even for psychotherapists, facts do matter. Two examples may suffice to show how facts as opposed to narratives can affect how a therapist conceptualises certain clinical situations in a way that I believe is relevant to our political discussion here:

1. Did the mother abandon the family when the 40-year-old client was 2 years old, 10 years old or 15 years old? Was it for a week, a few months or forever? This is an example in which the narrative may not have much impact on the client's contemporary environment and therapy can remain within the four walls of the clinic.
2. Was it the father who sexually abused the client, or the father's brother? This is especially important if the client is still a minor or a special-needs adult requiring protection. And it is no less important if the statute of limitations has not yet run out and the client may want to seek justice in a court of law. In the former situation, the therapist is a mandated reporter; in the latter, the therapist may have more leeway and be able to take the time necessary for the client to sort out who it really was. Regardless of whether or not the adult client seeks justice in court, the truth will certainly matter to the client, the father and everyone else in the family. That does not guarantee that the facts will become clear, but I do not think anyone would suggest that the facts here are unimportant. In this example, clinical work cannot remain purely within the therapy room as there is an intersection between societal/family needs and individual client needs.

The psychotherapist designs a therapy plan based upon the narrative told by the client, and the client's narrative is considered within the context of what the therapist knows of the actual history. For example, if the client presents herself as someone who was abandoned by her mother at age two for almost a year when the truth is that mother was hospitalised for one month when the client was six, her symptomology will be understood differently from the way it would have been had the narrative matched the true history. History and narrative together provide the basis for understanding the client and one without the other is incomplete. Sometimes the historical facts emerge only later in the therapy process, and adjustments in treatment are made accordingly.

What are some of the historical facts that need to be sorted out in the case of Israel and the Palestinian Arabs? Let us look first at four of the many unsubstantiated claims Solomon makes in his paper.

### 2.4.1 | The Jews and the Arabs have equal deep and humane claims to the land

Solomon cites novelist Amos Oz in support of this statement, but, with all due respect, Oz is not an authority in this matter. In order to assess whether or not both peoples have equal deep claims to the land we should know the history, not only of the Jewish, but also of the Arab presence on the land, find evidence of infrastructure the latter

constructed and signs of local establishment of permanent settlements with names derived from their own Arabic language and not Arabisation of the original Hebrew place names (Eshed, 2015).

The Arab Conquest and colonisation beginning in about 650 CE brought Arabs from what is now Saudi Arabia to the Levant. They killed and converted to Islam many of the inhabitants they found there; many others fled in fear. The Jews had already established an independent kingdom over 1500 years before the Arab Conquest. Even with multiple empires having conquered the Jewish lands, there was never a total ethnic cleansing of all the Jews. Many believe that the Babylonian Empire emptied the land of all its Jewish population, while, in fact, it was the elite classes that were removed to Babylon while the far more numerous farmers and artisans remained (Lipschitz, 2011).

When conquered by the Persians, the region became a province of their empire and was renamed “Yehud”, the root of the word Jew in both Hebrew and Arabic. It was only later that the Romans called the region “Palestine,” when it was a province in the Roman Empire, in order to detach from it all apparent Jewish connection to the land. New archaeological finds continue to reveal ancient Jewish—but not ancient Arab—settlement and religious and economic activities.

History shows that there was never an independent entity called Palestine, and it shows that the Arabs were a conquering, colonising force that invaded the indigenous lands of the Israelites (and others across northern Africa, for example). The descendants of these Arabs (and of the non-Arab Kurds who came from the north) are long-term residents of the region and deserve rights as such. But long-term residency does not outweigh the indigenous rights of those they conquered after the colonial empires have fallen and disappeared from history. Moreover, about 23% of the sudden threefold increase in the Arab population between 1920 and 1945 was due to immigration from neighbouring regions, the remainder attributed to natural increase because of reduced mortality rates (Bernstein, 2000); these latecomers were included in the UN special definition of Palestinian Arab refugees as being anyone who had resided in the Palestinian Mandate for at least two years prior to 1948 (Peretz, 1995). Therefore, upon what basis can it be suggested that the Palestinian Arabs have equal claim to the land?

I argue that the Palestinian Arabs do not have equal claim to the land. They have the rights of long-term residents. Does that make a difference to the negotiations between Israel and the Palestinian Authority (PA)? Perhaps and perhaps not. But the distinction between indigeneity and long-term residence, the difference between narrative and historical facts, should be kept in mind when analysing this case no less than when analysing the cases that come before the psychotherapist in the clinic.

Finally, Solomon's use of the word “humane” in the quote above is directly challenged by Landes (personal communication, 2018) who wonders how genocidal aspirations toward Jews on the part of the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO) and Hamas as expressed in their charters (Hamas, 2017; Maqdsi, 1993; Palestinian American Council, 1999) can be considered humane.

## 2.4.2 | Israelis are blind to Palestinian Arab suffering

It would be helpful to know Solomon's criteria for measuring “blindness,” to know the facts upon which he bases this statement. Solomon cites psychoanalysts who suggest reasons why this may be so, but he never questions the assumption. If he is right, then how do we account for the fact that the Israeli government provides electricity, water and medical care for Palestinian Arabs who often do not pay for them? How do we account for the daily shipping of many hundreds of trucks filled with supplies, for pumping water and providing electricity to Gaza even as rockets from Gaza fall on civilians in Israel and, more recently, as over 10,000 dunams (about 2,471 acres) of agricultural and forest lands were burned by incendiary balloons and kites released from Gaza over the past eight months? How do we account for the fact that there are Israelis who volunteer to meet Arabs at checkpoints, take them to hospital and then back to the checkpoint in their own cars and at their own expense? How do we account for the

fact that Israeli businessmen set up industrial firms along the border so they can hire Palestinian Arabs alongside Jews at the same salaries and benefits (far more than they get in the Palestinian Authority)?

But Solomon does not relate to any of this; instead he refers to British psychoanalyst Martin Kemp, who claims that Israelis are in denial of their responsibility for “the ongoing persecution of human beings like themselves” (p. 2), supposedly in defence against crippling guilt. Upon what does Kemp base this analysis? And does Solomon know that Kemp is strongly anti-Zionist and has been instrumental in promoting the Boycott, Divestment, Sanctions (BDS) movement against Israel, having compared Israel to Nazi Germany in print at least once (Kemp & Pinto, 2009)? Or is that a fact that has no salience in Solomon's opinion, making it okay to quote Kemp without challenging his views? Kemp's clear bias should at least be pointed out so readers can decide how much credence to give to his ideas.

Solomon also cites Landes' writing on civil society in support of his call for discussion rather than violence. However, Landes is referring to intra-national societal issues and does not deal with relationships between or among separate political entities (Landes, 2018a). In the latter case, it appears that Landes would suggest that fruitful negotiations can take place only between two societies that are equally civil, something he would not claim is true for the Palestinian Authority. More to the point, Solomon might find it instructive to read Landes' article entitled “Palestinian Suffering” (Landes, 2018b).

Finally, Solomon turns on its head Landes' discussion of Jewish self-criticism and the injunction to refrain from doing to others that which is hateful to oneself, something that often leads to moral equivalencies being drawn between the Palestinian Arabs and the Israelis. In an email, Landes wrote:

*[T]here is no Amos Oz among the Palestinians, no literature of empathy (like David Grossman's Yellow Wind). So what he [Solomon] does with me is turn my quote around to attack Israelis for not being sufficiently in tune with what I claim is their Jewish heritage. On the contrary, the Israelis have engaged in superhuman (and often misguided) efforts to “empathize” with their “neighbors” and often misread them through sympathetic projection. (personal communication, May 3, 2018)*

It seems to me that Landes' suggestion of “sympathetic projection” would be an interesting phenomenon for psychoanalytic writers to consider and to contrast with the assumption held by some that Israel is blind to Palestinian Arab suffering.

### **2.4.3 | Elor Azaria, the young soldier convicted of manslaughter for having killed an injured Palestinian Arab terrorist as he lay on the ground, was “everyone's son” and regarded as a hero in Israeli society**

Relying on the leftist newspaper, *Haaretz*, Solomon presents this as a fact. But is it? What proportion of Israeli society constitutes “everyone”? Was a survey taken in order to make this statement with confidence? Personally, I know far more people who were upset at what he did than those who excused it, never mind calling him a hero. That is just anecdotal evidence on my part, but, I dare say, so is the suggestion that he was commonly regarded as a hero among Israelis. Furthermore, the Israeli military system put Azaria in jail. From the Minister of Defence through the Chief of Staff to his field commanders, everyone strongly denounced his conduct. Therefore, in what regard can one claim that Azaria was “regarded as a hero in Israeli society”?

### **2.4.4 | Netanyahu is more concerned with expanding the settlements in Gaza and the West Bank than with making peace**

On what factual basis does Solomon repeat this false claim? First of all, Israel withdrew from Gaza in 2005 and tore down all the communities there, as well as four in the West Bank, so obviously there has been no settlement building there since. As for the West Bank (the proper name is Judea and Samaria), it appears that Netanyahu has built far less

than any other prime minister. The building starts that he did sanction were approved by the authorities over a decade earlier, but never implemented. If Solomon is concerned with the fact that Netanyahu approved *any* settlement building, it should at least be put into the correct context.

## 2.4.5 | Other historical issues to consider

Let me raise some historical issues that I think were not addressed in Solomon's paper. These historical issues should be considered alongside narratives before a psychoanalytic conceptualisation can be offered:

1. Sheehi and Sheehi (2016), cited by Solomon, write about the "loss of Palestine to the Zionists" (p. 94). What Palestine was lost? There was never a sovereign Palestinian state. Palestine was a province of the Roman Empire, part of a province without clear borders in the Ottoman Empire, and later the British Mandate of Palestine. The only time it was an independent sovereign entity was when it was under Jewish/Israelite/Hebrew rule.
2. When did the Arabs in the former British Mandate of Palestine begin referring to themselves as "Palestinians"? What did they call themselves before that? Answer: Israeli Arabs began referring to themselves as Palestinians in the late 1980s. Before that time, they saw themselves simply as Arabs, part of the Arab *Ummah* (People), and they were insulted if anyone called them Palestinians. Arabs in Judea and Samaria experienced a change after the Six-Day War of 1967, as recorded by Migdal (1980, p. 209):

*But what is important and novel about the Israeli occupation is the role of one of those factors—the PLO [Palestine Liberation Organization]. Because it coincides with the emerging Palestinian identity fostered by the occupation*

This implies that the Palestinian identity was at least in part a reaction to the Israeli victory over Jordan. The PLO was established in 1964, before the Six-Day War, and their map was the map of all the land between the Jordan River and the Mediterranean Sea.

3. The Palestinian Arabs did not seek sovereignty when Egypt occupied Gaza and Jordan occupied Judea and Samaria because they regarded themselves as part of the larger Arab *Ummah* and not as a separate political entity.
4. Judea and Samaria came to be called the West Bank only when the land was occupied by Jordan—just as the Romans called the region Palestine to cut it off from its Israelite connections, Jordan changed the name of Judea and Samaria for the same reason.
5. What is the source of the *Nakba*? Was it the Jews who expelled them, did they run from a war zone in fear, or did the Arab leaders from surrounding countries tell them to leave their homes to make it easier to wipe out the Jews? The answer to this still strongly debated question is relevant to what Solomon refers to as the centrality of *Nakba* in Israeli–Palestinian Arab relations; it may be more accurate to refer to the *Nakba* as central to the Palestinian Arab narrative.
6. About 850,000 Jewish refugees from Arab lands, forced to leave after the Israeli victory in 1948, found their way safely to Israel. Their lands and properties were confiscated and they have never received compensation. The great majority of them found refuge in Israel, others in Europe and North America, and they were absorbed into the countries in which they found themselves. In contrast, huge numbers of Palestinian Arab refugees are languishing in refugee camps in Jordan, Lebanon, Syria, and even in the Palestinian Authority. Those who have become citizens of Canada, the United States and European countries still maintain their refugee status as have their descendants. These demographics are important to consider when weighing narratives against history and when drawing up diagnostic analyses of the conflict.
7. The media and many academic writers, such as Sheehi and Sheehi (2016) who are cited in Solomon's paper, give the impression that the Jews of Israel are European settler-colonialists with no real roots in the land. However,



50% or more of the Jews in Israel are the descendants of refugees from Arab and northern African countries. There is no motherland other than Israel. The Jews are not settler-colonialists sending local natural resources back to any other country and archaeological digs unearth ancient Israelite artifacts, something no settler-colonial population anywhere in the world can claim.

8. Why is it that most people seem to think that the modern State of Israel came into being because of the Holocaust? After all, the original document declaring that a homeland for the Jewish People would be re-established in what later became the British Mandate of Palestine was signed in 1922. Furthermore, there were no binding agreements/documents signed afterward that changed that legal status. The misunderstanding that the Holocaust is the reason for Israel existing has raised the question of Israel's legitimacy in the minds of many who do not believe the Jewish state has the right to exist. This misperception has affected analyses of the conflict and proposals for resolution.
9. Is the current situation in Judea and Samaria one of illegal occupation, legal occupation or not an occupation? There are many arguments regarding whether or not Israel is currently occupying Judea and Samaria and these are beyond the scope of the current paper. All I will say in this regard is that once the Israelis and representatives of the Palestinian Arabs signed the Oslo Accords, in other words, once they agreed to the current situation on the ground, if there had been an occupation before this point, it then ceased to be an occupation.

There are many more historical facts that I believe need to be known before a psychoanalytic conceptualisation can confidently be proposed.

Many psychoanalysts writing on this topic seem to believe that the history is not all that important—the narratives the two sides tell about themselves are what is pertinent to understanding the current situation and that upon which a solution must be built. And compassionate listening to those narratives is what will bring healing. I wonder. Can healing be based upon twisting facts? If Israelis need to accept the false narrative that the Palestinian Arabs are the original Canaanites (Cecil123, 2016; Palwatch, 2016) in order for there to be peace, for example, how can that bring peace when that very lie is used to claim that the Jews have no history in the land of Israel, no right to sovereignty. It is happening right now in the United Nations with resolution after resolution intending to strip Jews of their connection with Jerusalem and Israel in spite of the fact that the very earth upon which they walk coughs up new evidence day after day.

## 2.5 | Toward a psychoanalytic conceptualisation of the situation

### 2.5.1 | Trauma and victims

Solomon and the psychoanalysts he cites correctly emphasise the concepts of collective memory and trauma, whether experienced directly or transmitted transgenerationally, as focal to the psychological understandings of Israelis and Palestinian Arabs. Similarly, those engaged in conflict resolution around the world (e.g., Audergon, 2004; Audergon & Audergon, 2009) view coping with collective traumatic memory an essential part of peacebuilding after conflict. There is no disagreement here.

However, if the psychotherapist has not taken a thorough history, then he or she is not yet prepared to devise a treatment plan. With insufficient data, it is unclear which theory or theories are relevant to the case at hand. It is interesting to note, I think, that those writing about the Israel–Arab/Palestine conflict are more familiar with the history of the European Jews in Israel than with the histories of the Arabs and of the Jews who came from Arab countries and northern Africa. They accept the “Palestinian narrative” as history enough and have insufficient knowledge about the history of Jews in the Arab world. This imbalance must be corrected.



If the psychotherapist is going to use traumatology as a basis upon which to devise treatment, then the victims and perpetrators need to be correctly identified. In this case, both Israelis and Palestinian Arabs feel victimised. The question is, by whom? And are both victimisations the same? Here again, history will provide answers and directions for further exploration.

If we compare this with a case of domestic violence, at one level we have a case in which one partner likely experiences victimisation both at the hands of the spouse and the extended family, whereas the other partner experiences victimisation by the partner and yet is supported by the extended family. Without going into the probabilities that each side will deny the validity of the accusations made by the other, this salient difference in systemic factors is important to add to a conceptualisation of the case.

Psychoanalysts such as Solomon and those he quotes should explain how they justify knowing that Hamas and the PLO seek Israel's destruction and yet insist that Israel make "trust-building" compromises anyway (such as ending the security limitations on imports into Gaza, or dismantling all road-blocks, or tearing down all the fences that save so many Jewish lives). Generally, when a violent spouse makes overt statements of intent to kill, the legal system kicks in and provides restraining orders; nobody involved in such cases suggests that the victim appease the violent spouse in an attempt to avert the violence. Yet that is exactly what they are asking of Israel.

The first order of the day is stopping the violence. Solomon and others claim that Israel is responsible for stopping the violence when they insist that Israel appease the PA in spite of ongoing acts of terror. I do not understand why nobody is recommending an unconditional restraining order on the PA as would be done in cases of domestic violence. Therapy would follow.

On the other hand, it seems Solomon and others equate Israeli settlement building and counterterrorism to terror supported by the PA (with salaries paid to the terrorist relative to the number of Jews he or she killed, and schools or streets named after them); observers claim that both contribute to what has come to be known as "the cycle of violence." But, on second thoughts, perhaps they are saying that settlement building and counterterrorism constitute assault and that the terror is merely the act of holding up one's hands defensively to counter the anticipated blows—that Israel is the abusive spouse and the Palestinian Authority is the battered wife. A thorough history-taking should either support or refute this possibility and promote an understanding of the actual dynamics at play. At the same time, it does not explain certain observations.

Specifically, can we find in psychoanalysis or other psychological theories an explanation for the fact that a centre-left Israeli government under Rabin and Peres was honestly working toward the implementation of the Oslo Accords against strong internal opposition while buses were exploding in downtown Tel-Aviv? Likewise, is there a psychological explanation why, after Israel evacuated the Gaza Strip of all Jewish settlements and military installations and indicated an intention to do the same on the West Bank, Hamas continues to subject Israel to terrorist attacks against its civilians from the same Jew-free Gaza? After all, the government did then what psychoanalysts are telling Israel to do now—to get out with no preconditions. Why should getting out of Judea and Samaria be expected to produce a different result than leaving Gaza?

## 2.5.2 | The Israel–Palestine/Arab couple in therapy

The point of couples work—whether it involves violence or not—is to explore the ways in which each partner triggers the other, raising still unresolved issues from their pasts, and developing new responses. However, both partners need to be motivated to make change, to work on themselves. Has the PLO or Hamas shown signs of being ready for such efforts? Has Israel? Psychoanalytic writers need to contend with this issue if their work is to have much meaning.

Each therapeutic endeavour begins with assumptions—a kind of *a priori* countertransference (Tauber, 1998). Then, when therapists actually meet the patient/couple, they begin to hear the stories their clients tell and they begin to adjust their *a priori* impressions. They need to examine these stories for hints of how each spouse's story affects

the other, how the couples' stories affect their therapists and how the therapists' responses affect clients. This is the nature of intersubjectivity (Stolorow & Atwood, 1996)—mutual influences on all involved by all involved. It is possible that we are seeing evidence of *a priori* countertransference in the psychoanalytic writings on the Israel–Palestine/Arab conflict without the authors having exerted sufficient effort in thoroughly re-examining these assumptions (and this can be said to be true for me as well, but I am a member of the couple and not the therapist in this case). Again, history might be able to help us understand the mutual interaction effects of Jews/Israelis on Arabs/Palestinian Arabs and the mutual interaction effects of witnesses and active players over the centuries that can provide a solid foundation upon which to understand today's dynamics.

Regarding the intersubjectivity of the psychoanalyst, Solomon's opening statements concerning his personal bias and his invitation to others to respond to him, are, in effect saying: I am willing to have you, the reader, affect me. Therefore, he may be open to exploring his own *a priori* countertransference and what the Israeli–Palestinian/Arab conflict triggers from his own past. Will this shed light on why he appears so concerned for the Palestinian Arabs who are in conflict with Israel but has nothing to say about Palestinian Arabs suffering apartheid in Lebanon and Syria, displaced *en masse* from Kuwait and Yemen, etc.?

Perhaps his personal openness is where Solomon's paper provides a most important contribution to the field: an invitation to examine the personal in the political in psychoanalytic writings about global human rights issues (see also Audergon & Audergon, 2009).

### 2.5.3 | The value of imposing intervention from outside

Solomon quotes psychotherapists who declare both sides as suffering from psychological disturbances. And for peace to break out, he hints that we need international intervention to push us into making uncomfortable compromises. Perhaps this international intervention, then, could take the form of involuntary commitment to a mental ward? Then the “medical team” can prescribe “drugs” and such—as if Israelis and Palestinian Arabs are not responsible adults making adult decisions, right or wrong.

After all, the international community did such a good job of taking care of Syria. Is that the kind of intervention Solomon suggests for Israel and the Palestinian Authority?

## 2.6 | Conclusions

Peacebuilding proposals offered in the case of Israel and the Palestinian Authority (PA) are unique among global conflicts in that, in other parts of the world, it appears that the conflict is over before peacebuilding teams go in to help communities resolve historic issues and work toward a more positive future. In these other places, while hostilities often remain, the fighting itself is over. Only then do the professionals begin meeting with middle-level leaders and community members on both sides who now have to build a common future, whether that is in bordering countries, conjointly in the same country, intermingled within the same neighbourhoods, or adjacently in homogeneous regions that agree to live side by side in peace even if not in harmony (Paffenholz, 2015).

In the case of Israel and the PA, on the other hand, the idea being promoted is not *peace-building* but *peace-making*. The aim is to create the conditions for a cessation of the current war of attrition and get the sides to sign a peace agreement. Who, exactly, do the psychoanalysts view as their clients in this case? It seems that their writing is not targeting the political upper echelons that make the decisions, but the general population.

Do they believe that grassroots movements, such as the anti-war movement in the USA during the Vietnam War or the Four Mothers movement in Israel that led to the withdrawal from the security area in Lebanon in 2000 will do the trick? Is that their inspiration? Perhaps. Both these movements led to unilateral pull-outs from enemy territory and that is just what psychoanalysts believe Israel should do. Solomon suggests that Israel should make difficult trust-building

concessions before expecting anything from the PA. How is that different from me asking Solomon to give me the keys to his home before we have signed a sales contract? And how has this got anything to do with psychoanalysis?

Personally, I wonder if, short of getting the leaders of the PA and Israel into a psychotherapist's clinic, psychoanalysis has anything practical to offer at this point. It would be nice to be able to make everyone, if not like each other, at least be willing to get along. But making peace deals is a political task for country leaders; making it work in the long run is the point at which local people become involved (Audergon, 2004; Paffenholz, 2015). When psychoanalysts jump prematurely onto the co-existence make-nice bandwagon, I believe they render the peacemaking task harder.

In sum, then, I would like to suggest to Solomon that the important points to understanding the psychoanalytic underpinnings of successful peacemaking in a conflict such as that between Israel and the PA include: thorough history taking, understanding the importance of precise timing, defining who the clients really are and identifying their ultimate goals, assessment of readiness for change, and a willingness on the part of the writers to examine their own *a priori* countertransference and triggers related to their own personal histories. While I am not sure such analysis has practical applications at this point in time, I do believe it is a fascinating avenue to pursue that may prove applicable after peace-signing ceremonies, when the work of engaging the local populations begins.

### 3 | A REPLY TO SHERI OZ'S RESPONSE - PAUL SOLOMON

I thank Sheri Oz for her very full response to my article on roadblocks to negotiation between Israelis and Palestinians, and welcome the opportunity to engage in a dialogue from our different standpoints. I understand that her comments are based in a right-wing perspective, while mine come from a leftist view. In the week when I received Sheri Oz's response *The Times of Israel* (Wootliff, 2018) reported "In 2012, just nine percent of Jewish Israelis identified the right-left divide as the worst rift in the country. Today, that number stands at 36%, according to a poll released on Monday by the Israel Democracy Institute" (para. 2). I hope that my commentary on Oz's response can be the respectful debate she mentions: the distance between our divergent views parallels the polarisation of Israeli society.

Oz declares herself to be left of centre economically, right of centre politically, and wants a degree of Jewish religious law and tradition to shape Israeli public spaces; accordingly she refers to "Judea and Samaria", the term preferred by the Israeli political and religious right. The ancient biblical names Judea and Samaria have been used by the right-wing Israeli government and by religious settlers since the area was occupied during the 1967 war. Many of those on the Israeli left refer to the "West Bank", or simply "the Territories". The USA and the United Nations consider the West Bank to be occupied Palestinian territory, but like many on the political right Oz does not accept that there is an occupation.

The matter of naming territory seems connected to Oz's assertion in her response that Israeli Jews are indigent to the land of Israel and that the Arabs' "long-term residency does not outweigh indigenous rights of those they conquered after the colonial empires have fallen and disappeared from history". Oz refers to the Arab conquest and colonisation beginning about 650 CE and the ancient Jewish kingdom that as established 1500 years before this, i.e. around 850 BCE. God's instructions to the ancient Israelites were to enter the land of Canaan; according to the biblical Deuteronomy were these:

*And when the Lord thy God hath delivered it into thine hands, thou shalt smite every male thereof with the edge of the sword: ... thou shalt save alive nothing that breatheth: thou shalt utterly destroy them; namely, the Hittites, and the Amorites, the Canaanites, and the Perizzites, the Hivites, and the Jebusites; as the Lord thy God hath commanded thee. (Deuteronomy 20:13-18, King James Version)*

This is how the Book of Deuteronomy shaped Jewish public spaces. Jewish indigenous rights trumped indigenous rights of the Hittites, Canaanites, Perizzites, Hivites, and Jebusites. At the United Nations Mahmoud Abbas,

the President of the Palestinian Authority claimed Palestinians are descended from ancient Canaanites ("Abbas says Palestinians are the descendants of Canaanites", 2018). The perpetual cyclical slaughter and land seizure endemic to Canaan/Israel/Palestine/the Levant still continues and is satirised in a poignant animation by Nina Paley (Badtaste Ronny, 2017), "This land is mine", set to the Exodus song by Pat Boone who sings "God gave this land to me". I mention all this to support my contention that the argument from indigeneity is horribly flawed, even though Israeli Jews and Palestinian Arabs trace the beginnings of their sense of peoplehood to the same land in different times, and despite the efforts of some Palestinians to erase archaeological evidence of Jewish presence in ancient times. Does it really matter when the various ethnic groups arrived? They are here now, they may even be as genetically related as biblical brothers Cain and Abel, so what is to be done? A humane negotiation would be based on the common humanity of the Jews and Arabs who call themselves Israelis and Palestinians, and might begin when Jews and Arabs acknowledge that both peoples belong to the land rather than competing for exclusive *possession of the land* (Biran, 2015, p. 75).

Oz disputes Amos Oz's assertion that the Jews and the Arabs have equal deep and humane claims to the land. As well as the matter of rights conferred by indigeneity, she acknowledges the long-term residence of the Arab population, but does not accept that the Palestinian Arabs' claim is humane because of the genocidal aspirations of Hamas; she is supported in this view by the historian Richard Landes. Nevertheless, I argue that the Palestinians' claim to the land is indeed humane; it is their response to the expropriation of their homes and homeland and to years of harsh and repressive Israeli military rule in the West Bank and policing of Gaza that is violent.

Oz (respectfully) does not accept that Amos Oz is an authority on these matters: but I suggest that his authority derives from being born in Jerusalem in 1939 during the British mandate, from being a founder of the Israeli peace movement, and from his stature as probably Israel's most famous and internationally renowned author. He is also a professor of literature. According to her website Sheri Oz arrived in Israel from Canada in the 1970s. To not accept the authority of Amos Oz is as if a Russian in the nineteenth century refused to accept Anton Chekhov's analysis of spiritual and emotional malaise in that society. But Sheri Oz says that she does not accept the authority of the Israeli left; she says that the left-wing newspaper *Haaretz* is biased against Israel (I disagree, and suggest *Haaretz* supports democracy in Israel by opposing Israel's right-wing government) and does not trust the peace camp which she describes as traitorous and attacking Israel. Israelis on the political left think that the human rights organisations support Israel by exercising their democratic right to call society to account when government policy and the conduct of the Israeli army fail to observe ethical and humane norms.

I will comment on the widespread framing of the conflict in terms of a clash between third world fundamentalist terrorists and Western civilising forces. In this discourse the violence of the oppressed is pathologized and the violence of the oppressors overlooked (Blackwell, 2012). Israelis and some Western onlookers understand the Israel/Palestine conflict in terms of Israeli civilising forces benignly struggling to protect innocent Israeli citizens from Palestinian third-world fundamentalist terrorism. This normalises Israeli army violence, viewed as a reasonable defence against terror, which is pathologized. By contrast many Palestinians experience Israeli army actions as oppressive violence, and justify Palestinian violence as a retaliation, a fight for freedom and justice. They want the return of their homes which were stolen by the Jews in 1948, in the war that followed what Israelis call the foundation of the Jewish state, and Palestinians refer to as *al Nakba*, the catastrophe. It is a cliché that "our side's terrorist is the other side's freedom fighter". The history and the facts are disputed not only between Israelis and Palestinians, but between factions among Israelis; the basis for peace negotiations is not yet established.

Awful conditions in Gaza have driven the Palestinians into the arms of extremist Hamas, and to respond violently to militarised suppression is deeply human. Acknowledging the human-ness of retaliatory violence does not excuse Hamas' use of Palestinian children as de-facto soldiers who are encouraged to throw stones and roll burning tyres at Israeli troops guarding the border, or the choices to spend millions of foreign aid dollars constructing underground attack tunnels, building palaces for their leaders and paying lifetime salaries to the families of their citizens who have committed "martyrdom". Palestinians who criticise Hamas or collaborate with Israelis to prevent terror attacks are tortured or killed.

I was glad to hear from Oz that I grossly exaggerated the number of Israelis describing Elor Azaria (the young soldier convicted of manslaughter for killing an injured terrorist as he lay on the ground) as “everyone’s son” and regarding him as a hero. Oz says that she knew many people who, like the Minister of Defence and his Chief of Staff, denounced his brutal conduct. However on Azaria’s release from his nine-month jail sentence for manslaughter (the charge was downgraded from murder) *The Times of Israel* (Magid, 2018), not a left-wing newspaper, reported that he was given a hero’s welcome in Hebron, and that several government ministers tweeted or emailed statements supporting him. These included minister of education Naftali Bennett, and prime minister Benjamin Netanyahu. Transportation and Intelligence minister Israel Katz called for Azaria’s criminal record to be deleted, and so did Culture and Sports Minister Miri Regev. Hebron is the second largest city in the West Bank and a stronghold for Jewish religious extremists within the settler movement. An influential constituency of Israelis including government ministers support and admire Azaria, and other Israelis think his jail term was too short: Israeli society is polarised.

Regarding my assertion that Israelis are blind to Palestinian suffering, Oz lists the many humanitarian efforts by the Israeli government in providing the necessities of life to Palestinian Arabs, and mentions the many individual Israelis whose kind actions help make life more bearable for people dealing with the blockade, unemployment, checkpoints, hospital visits, etc., and I applaud them. I cited British psychoanalyst Martin Kemp’s claim that Israelis are blind to Palestinian suffering; Oz objects to this because Kemp advocates boycotting Israel in order to encourage the end of the illegal occupation of the West Bank, has compared Israeli policies to Nazism, and she thinks this makes him an anti-Semite: perhaps so, but for Oz it is not possible that he may also have a reasoned view, that we may or may not agree with. She adopts a polarised position: if Kemp harbours anti-Semitic thoughts Oz refuses to think about anything he suggests.

Some Israeli Jews and Jewish supporters of Israel in the diaspora agree with Kemp about Israeli blindness and denial. For example, Carlo Strenger, a professor of philosophy and psychology at Tel Aviv University, cited Dror Moreh’s poignant documentary “The Gatekeepers”, in which former Israeli security chiefs describe the terrible moral cost to Israel of the occupation:

*They have the human strength to say that their job made them do terrible things. For most humans it is almost impossible to do terrible things and live with the realisation that these acts were immoral ... Most Israelis ... need a narrative that justifies Israel's actions as inevitable (Strenger, 2014)*

I suggest the soldiers of “Breaking the Silence” display the same human strength as the former Israeli security chiefs who testify in “The Gatekeepers”. Sheri Oz and rightist Government ministers including Tzipi Hotoveli (Foreign affairs) and Ayelet Shaked (Justice) condemn Breaking the Silence and other human rights organisations as traitors and liars. I support the Israeli left, and applaud the former soldiers of Breaking the Silence and other human rights organisations. I believe they are fighting for the survival of democratic and humanistic civil rights in Israel by simply telling the Israeli public what they did on their behalf in the occupied Palestinian territories. They do not support the boycott, divestment and sanctions (BDS) movement; they do not excuse Palestinian violence; they simply want to show Israeli society how ugly the occupation is (Mattar, 2015).

Another commentator on Israeli blindness to Palestinian suffering is Naomi Chazan, former deputy speaker of the Knesset and Professor (Emerita) of political science at the Hebrew University. In an article entitled “Occupation blindness” (2018) Chazan noted that most Israelis’ lives are physically separate from the Palestinians, they travel along separate roads, work in different places, shop in their own communities and do not socialise with each other. And “out of sight means out of mind... What cannot be seen apparently also cannot cause discomfort” (para. 3). Chazan suggested that another reason for the disinterest of the majority of Israeli Jews in the plight of Palestinians is simply denial.

Nancy Caro Hollander (2016) accounted for the blindness of Israelis to Palestinian suffering, and of Palestinians to trauma experienced by Jewish Israelis. She offered a psychoanalytic exploration of the trauma-dominated subjectivities of both Israeli Jews and Palestinians. Hollander has for ten years been a member of the Psychoanalytic Work Group for Peace in Israel/Palestine, a collaboration of psychoanalytically-trained mental health professionals from the

US, England, Israel, Egypt, Palestine, and Saudi Arabia dedicated to facilitating empathic dialogue among US mental health colleagues that explores both the Palestinian and Israeli narratives (Hollander, 2016, p. 60). She cited a report by the International Monetary Fund (2014) that mentioned Israeli states of denial of Palestinian suffering in the occupied territories (p. 61). Hollander laid out the psychological mechanisms that prevent the majority of Israelis and Palestinians being able to enter empathic dialogue, or to experience compassion for one another by seeing themselves mirrored in their respective traumatic experiences (Nakba and Holocaust). She described victim states of mind that in an atmosphere saturated with violence, "shape the psychological experience of both peoples and account for the complex systemic asymmetries that impede the possibilities for a just reconciliation of their tragic conflict" (p. 60). Perhaps the shaping factors that Hollander identified are analogous to the "a priori counter-transferences" mentioned by Oz.

In her book *The Courage of Simplicity* (2015), Israeli group analyst Hanni Biran offered a groupanalytic and psychoanalytic account of the social unconscious foundation matrix (Foulkes, 1990) of Israeli and Palestinian societies in a chapter entitled "The difficulty of channelling rage into dialogue". I contend that Hanni Biran's analysis, and that of Hollander (mentioned above) show that politicians are subject to the same dynamic forces and cognitive distortions as the general population; everyone lives in the same "traumatic reality saturated with violence" (Biran, 2015, p. 158) and experiences the same "difficulty in channelling rage into dialogue" (p. 157). When Israeli leader Rabin and Egyptian President Sadat tried to transform rage into dialogue they were assassinated by extremists from their own nations, who were not ready for peace. Their deaths disheartened many who wanted peace. The leaders needed support from all their constituents, not just other politicians.

I would like to respond to an important and understandably pessimistic statement that Oz makes in her conclusion. It seems to her that writing by psychoanalysts "is not targeting the political upper echelons that make the decisions, but the general population", and says "Personally, I wonder if, short of getting the leaders of the PA and Israel into a psychotherapist's clinic, psychoanalysis has anything practical to offer at this point". Oz also makes the important distinction between peace-making (cessation of hostilities, peace treaties) and peace-building after peace is achieved. Oz lives in Israel and experiences first-hand the atmosphere of hostility, terror attacks, "peaceful" demonstrations on the Gaza border by Palestinians and their children carrying Molotov cocktails, knives, guns and fire-kites; and on the Lebanese border, Iranian-backed Hezbollah attack tunnels and the threat of thousands of rockets: peace must seem like an unrealistic dream and I understand that. I live in peaceful New Zealand, but my history and psychological identifications mean that I care about Israel and want her to survive and flourish; and I wish the Palestinians well also and hope one day they will escape their inept and genocidal leadership, accept the reality of Israel's existence, and move towards peace-making.

Biran (2015) quoted Eyad El-Sarraj, the Palestinian psychiatrist who died in 2014:

*Palestinians and Israelis need to accept that they are interdependent ... Liberation of the Palestinians from the Israeli occupation of their land, from their humiliation and suffering, will happen when the Israelis are liberated from their fear and insecurity. Palestinian bullets only strengthen Israelis' sense of victimisation and paranoia. (p. 172)*

If Israelis and Palestinians did decide to engage in the psychological treatment that Oz mentions or thinks I advocate (even if she has her tongue firmly in her cheek) both sides would need at a minimum to abandon their "defensive certainty about (their) radical innocence" (Hollander, 2016, p. 64), and to develop the "depressive position's capacity to acknowledge that one's own group, as well as the other, is both good and bad, perpetrator and victim, loving and hateful, right and wrong" (p. 65). And I certainly agree with many of Oz's comments about the Israel/Palestine-Arab couple in therapy. Neither Hamas nor the PLO have shown any motivation to do the psychological and emotional work of reconciliation, and the hawkish Israeli government would no doubt scorn therapy; both "spouses" are locked in rigid defensive aggressive patterns of mutual blame, hostility, attack and retribution that Hollander (above) described so tellingly. Leaders of both sides are entrenched in self-idealisation, convinced of the evil intent of the other, not inclined to dialogue.

The psychoanalysts, psychotherapists, and others cited above offer new ways of understanding psychic realities that maintain the cycle of violence; many leaders on both sides are deaf and blind, locked into vicious cycles of hatred and paranoia. But individual Palestinians and Israelis whose children have been killed in the conflict continue to join together in the Bereaved Families Forum, which I described in my original article. And Sheri Oz mentions cordial employer–employee relationships, and individual Israelis engaging in acts of kindness to individual Palestinians. Peace treaties have been agreed with Egypt and Jordan so there is hope, and I encourage Oz to continue to do what psychotherapists do: that is, to facilitate open thinking and empathy for the perspective of the “other” when it differs from one’s own, even in a situation that makes it nearly impossible to think (Biran, 2015). Ours is a relatively new discipline, a new factor in the psychic atmosphere, and our influence is growing in many societies. Let us hope that one day leaders will find their way to using the perspectives that psychotherapists can offer. Let us never give up hope.

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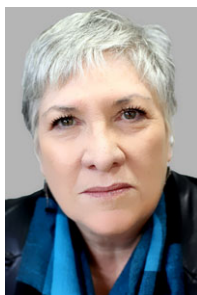
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