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ISSN: 1048-1885 print/1940-9222 online

DOI: 10.1080/10481881003716248



Face to Face

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In "Face to Face," I explore my work as a Jewish analyst with a Lebanese woman, Ara, who is strongly identified with the Palestinian cause. As the work unfolded I find myself thrust into a psychic and so-cial space I had not wanted to inhabit, into the Israeli-Palestinian conflict and the turmoil of Jewish identity. Ara and I were in the midst of ghosts of historical traumas, intersecting and interweaving his-tory and identity between us. It was her history and my history and the history of nations, of broken bonds and damaged victims suddenly all present in the room. I will hold together, in tension, the micro and the macro, the intrapsychic and social, the drama of the encounter between Ara and me and be-tween Palestinians and Jews. I ask what it takes to find one's way into an understanding of the other, a recognition of the other and the legitimacy of their suffering when one's own history is suffused with the trauma of centuries of victimhood. "Face to Face" is an exploration of how to inhabit the Other, how to negotiate difference, moving beyond the dynamics of victim and victimizer, beyond that of op-pressor and oppressed to what Emmanuel Levinas refers to as a welcoming of the strange r, a transcen-dent experience.

Before Ara walked into my office I remember feeling an unusual amount of anxiety as I imagined what the first session would be like. My anxiety seemed to locate itself around a specific question. Would she ask me if I was Jewish? Would that be a reasonable question for an Arab woman raised in the Middle East to ask? What did I imagine she would want to know in that question? What would I not want to reveal? Besides, what are reasonable questions to ask in a first session? If she were a Jewish patient asking me if I was Jewish, would that be a question I would answer?

Her first session was on a cool Friday morning in mid-December. She was dressed down in jeans, looking comfortable and self-possessed. She opened the session talking about the unpleasant experience she had had with her previous therapist. What she described sounded like an intellectual sparring match that lasted 6 months. She emerged feeling quite bruised and battered. They were trying to deal with the trauma of her childhood sexual abuse. Sometimes the therapist's words felt so harsh she would find herself crying as she left, taking days to recover from sessions. She would return more determined to not be broken. Finally it was enough. "Way too American," she declared, referring to her perception of Americans as aggressive. Only on ending did she discover that the therapist had had no idea that she was feeling traumatized.

She had received my name from a colleague and knew I was not American born. After Googling me, which seems to now be acceptable practice, she discovered I was interested in race. She decided she would try therapy again, although she was skeptical. During the first session I felt

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that I couldn't reach her. In whatever way I tried to understand or empathize, she would respond with a variation of "No, that's not right," even when I thought I was mirroring her. After the second session I felt as if she didn't want to let herself feel understood by me. I chose to be quiet but tried to take her in. There was a feisty, argumentative quality about her. Don't come too close was the message I received. I held back. She spoke of her nightmares, anxiety, and sleep problems. She refused to speak of the sexual abuse. It was over, she told me, she was done with that. The most pressing issue was her struggle to end a 4-year relationship with a smart and engaging man. Ara, in her early 20s, described this as her first serious relationship and an open one. She felt desperate to find a way to be without Joseph. She felt she couldn't trust him, he was hurtful and insensitive. Their lives felt entangled. Joseph, another Arab living in New York, had become family to her. She would have difficulty going to sleep without him. He was comfortable and safe. Despite many of the dramatic blow-ups they had had over the years he would, with dogged perseverance, win her back. She hated herself for needing him. She complained he was not emotionally accessible and she felt constantly being pulled in to be hurt again. Over time she described a turbulent relationship that fluctuated as to who was being hurtful to whom.

I struggled in the beginning to grasp her. She certainly felt different to me. Her use of language would sometimes puzzle me (despite her excellent facility with English), and her responses to me would be difficult to discern. If I felt she was becoming sad or weepy, she would tell me that that was not her emotional state at all; if I thought she had told me one thing in a session before, she would say it was quite the opposite. She could be difficult, she told me later, never really letting anyone in. She could also be quite charming and people seemed to be attracted to her, even as she disengaged, or perhaps as a result of her disengaging. There was something in her eyes I found appealing, a wounded look, a plea for safety. I was drawn to her.

Her childhood was beset with personal tragedy in the midst of the chaos and trauma of war. Her father, a successful and charismatic figure, had died when she was 3. He remained an idealized figure in fantasy, someone she remembered feeling safe with. The family, consisting of her mother and older sister, had moved in with her paternal uncle, who had taken over their care until he died unexpectedly when she was 9, in the midst of the war. This devastated her mother, sending her into a deep depression and the first of a series of hospitalizations. Ara had lost her father, uncle, and it felt as if her mother had disappeared too. From living in a family that was social, financially stable, and powerful she was suddenly faced with emptiness and a somewhat precarious existence, moving in with different people at different times when her mother would be hospitalized. Her sister was the most stable figure in her life. Ara was forced into an early independence, making decisions for herself, even as to what school to attend, driving a car at age 13 (although illegal) and developing her tough exterior. Yet in many ways she remained the little girl who had hidden in the closet at the tragic news of her uncle's death. She was still afraid of coming out, always hiding somewhere inside herself.

Over the next few weeks she proceeded to tell me, in a rather matter-of-fact manner, details of her family history, growing up in Lebanon with loss and suffering prevalent throughout. I began to recognize in her voice the cut-off, dissociated quality that accompanies trauma. She recalled memories of when Israel invaded Lebanon in the 1980s, through the eyes of a child, but with no apparent affect. She was 6 years old when she got stuck at school as it was too dangerous to return home. It was cold, dark, with little food or adults present. She remembered the children taking care of each other, comforting and distracting the crying ones and playing war games. "Where will the bomb land?" was a favorite. She recounted stories of her uncle herding them to bomb shelters as

they were living in an area where there was intense fighting between different military groups within Lebanon. Not only were they dealing with the Israelis but disputes between warring factions within Lebanon. She described not knowing who was fighting who, not knowing where the shooting was coming from, and when it would end.

She brought me her first dream on our fourth session. "It's about terrorism," she said, watching me closely. "Buildings are being blown up in New York City. I am watching the bombings from my window." She hesitated a moment, a smile crossing her face. "I feel very happy." She observed me closely from her seated position on the couch, the farthest she could be from me. How would I react to her dream? Would I be horrified or repulsed? Would I retaliate? How would I deal with the terrorist in her? I initially felt a jolt of shock, but I was also intrigued, I knew this would be a way to access a deeper set of dynamics that had been eluding me. I stayed silent again, but open. "Palestinians die all the time," she continued, her voice now brimming with feeling, a bitter, caustic edge. "Nobody seems to care about them." I nodded my head. I understood that. "I hate American foreign policy and I hate all Israelis and all Zionists, and maybe all Jews too," she said.

Why had I imagined the question of who I was would come in the form of a simple inquiry? My reaction to her provocation would be a far better way to judge my character and acquire a sense of where my identifications lay. Would I, in my New York office, far away from any real war zone, know what it feels like to be displaced, to be without home? Could I understand helplessness, humiliation, even desperation? I sat quietly, again, taking in her anger and hatred. At the end of the session she said that her best friend was seeing a Jewish therapist and that according to this friend all the therapists in New York City were Jews. She did not want to know if I was Jewish. Very quickly she dismissed even the discussion of why she did not want to know. In so many areas the possibility of knowing carried intense anxiety. "Besides", she declared, "it shouldn't matter any-way what you are." I was supposed to be impartial, neutral as if orthodox psychoanalytic doctrine, with which she was familiar, was to be used as a rationale for our identities not to matter, a way to protect us.

I responded that I couldn't say who I was wouldn't matter. I didn't know how it might come to matter, if it did, but felt sure that we would find a way to work it out. I also said that we were both here to understand her and to help her, and hopefully to feel that we were on the same side. She then asked if I had a second session the next week. I felt us both drawing a little closer.

In the following session she brought in her second dream. This time she was naked in a strange, dirty motel room with Joseph, who was gleefully taunting and laughing at her. She didn't understand why she was with him and what he was doing. She had to get out, dressing quickly. She tried to hit him but couldn't land the punch. We talked about her sense of feeling naked, hurt, and exposed in her relationship with him. She also carried a sense of shame and helplessness at not being able to get out of this relationship. She was furious with herself for not being able to end her relationship with any finality, for missing him and allowing him back. She decided she would no longer see him. She prided herself in being able to cut people out, throughout her life, when she felt it necessary. I understood the transference implications. The multiple abandonments of her childhood and the effects of trauma hung in the background.

It is worth thinking about the first dream, or perhaps the first two dreams, as setting the stage for the treatment (Stekel, 1943). She was laying out her internal struggles—an identification with the aggressor, although displaced, but in which she took great pleasure and a more difficult identification with the abused, which she had to get away from.

She talked about finding the sessions helpful, that she experienced herself opening up and not feeling as guarded. Her anxiety was lessening somewhat. A session or two later she announced that she was now dating a Jewish man. She said it as if she had never mentioned her hatred of Israel and Jews. I sensed immediately that there was a transference enactment that could not yet be verbalized. I also felt surprised at how open she was to a new object relationship and how quickly she was taking me in despite how unpredictable and bristly she seemed. In addition there seemed to be a subtle erotic dimension that was evolving in the transference-countertransference.

In the room, I described to her my experience of a cat-and-mouse dynamic between us. She would mention something that sounded important but in an obfuscating manner, I would feel the desire to pursue it and understand it, while she, without warning, would become flooded and withdraw. If I stepped back and slowed down the pace of the work, she would feel that nothing was happening and would come out and tempt me with something else. She laughed describing it as similar to what she had with Joseph.

Still early in the treatment as the work was unfolding and progressing she returned to exploring the time she had spent as a child, how it felt to live in a war zone. Near the end she began to speak of Israeli aggression towards the Palestinians and Israel's destruction of Lebanon. At some point she remarked that in the Middle East it is a statement of fact that Israel is a colonial-settler state, while in New York she cannot say this without being viewed as an extremist.

Suddenly, for the first time, I couldn't understand what she was saying. I repeated to myself, "Israel is a colonial-settler state." I tried to slow down my thinking. I had no idea what the words meant. My mind was moving fast. Something was happening to me. I heard the words, "drive the Jews into the sea." It was a strange and disorienting experience. I knew she had not said that. I had no idea where this phrase had come from. She was talking to me, I was looking at her, I know I appeared composed, but I could not hear anything. I could not take in any more words. My mind was repeating her words over and over with the hope that they might calm me. I wanted something to hold onto. Nothing was working. Even after the session ended I could not make sense of what she had said. Israel is a settler state, a colonial-settler state! Although I knew what the actual words meant, something eluded me. I did not know what was going on with me. I pride myself in my rationality, yet that part of me could not come to the rescue. It took some time before I did finally take the meaning in. Then I had to wonder what had happened? I questioned myself with some repulsion at what seemed a primitive and racist thought that had lurked in the recesses of my mind. What was the origin of that statement? Clearly I had read and heard the phrase² but it had had no personal resonance for me. Without having ever lived in Israel, without ever being a Zionist, I was awash in fears of the destruction of Israel. I had not responded similarly to the dream of bombing New York City, a place to which I have a deep attachment, but to Israel, to which I thought I had none. The destruction of Israel... the destruction of Jews... the Holocaust. The links had bypassed secondary process

¹Refer to Maxime Rodinson's (1973) *Israel: A Colonial-Settler State?* The question whether Israel can be classified as a colonial-settler state (a state established through the expropriation of the people and their land followed by subjugation and exploitation) and the Palestinians as colonially oppressed by Israel is a major debate that began in the 1960s among leading left wing Arab and Israeli intellectuals and still remains a contentious issue.

²This highly evocative phrase has been variously attributed to Gamel Abdul Nasser and to Arafat. In October 1961 Israeli prime minister David Ben Gurion discussing the Arab's exit from Palestine in 1948 stated that the Palestinians left following the Mufti's instructions under the assumption that the Arab armies would destroy the Jewish state and push all the Jews into the sea, dead or alive. The phrase has since acquired a life of its own and is quite contentious as to its origins.

thinking. Without warning I had been thrust into Holocaust anxiety, European Jewry destroyed in a matter of a few years.

Traumatic memory, unconsciously transmitted across generations has a powerful way of en-crypting itself into one's identity (Abraham & Torok, 1975), burrowing in without consent, without conscious knowledge. It is the inexplicable, unnamable, unassimilable aspect of genocide that obliterates knowing and remembering leaving emptiness, absence, an erasure in its place. The psychic landscape becomes desolate (Laub & Auerhahn, 1993; Laub & Lee, 2001), an area of deadness (Grand, 2000). That which cannot be known weaves its way into the body and the psyche shaping the unconscious psychic representations for generations to come. It is not the "unthought known" (Bollas, 1987) or the unformulated (Stern, 1997) but the unformulatable (Grand, 2000). This collapse of the knowable becomes the organizing principle, the genetic inheritance of those who follow. For Laub and Lee (2001) it is the death instinct itself released in the survivor that is transmitted across the generations. It is the death instinct as the destruction of the perceiving self and of that which is to be perceived. In the Lacanian register it is an encounter with the Real. We are in a deep pit without edge (Caruth, 2007), a place of disturbing strangeness. In the words of Davoine and Gaudilliere (2004) what gets transmitted are "pieces of frozen time." The impenetrability of psychic death may take decades, evolving and altering the landscape of people on its way, being relived over and over in many generations before knowing may even be approached (Laub & Lee, 2001). "The long shadow of history and historic trauma works itself deeply into psyches" (Harris, 2007, p. 664).

I found myself in the midst of imminent danger of mass destruction just from a statement about Israel's policy towards the Palestinians. The indecipherable trauma of the Holocaust, which I had thought only grazed my family, had overwhelmed my psychic space in a matter of minutes, contaminating my clean American consoling room.

According to Davoine (2007) my reaction might be described as a moment of madness, madness being a rupture in the social link evoked in a moment when that which is unnameable and un-sayable endeavors to be incorporated into language. That which has never been inscribed appears in the room. The analytic space becomes a theatrical space where strange characters, spirits, shadows, or demons may enter, a place where catastrophic histories that are carried but may not belong to either patient or analyst are brought forth (Caruth, 2007). The enactments of the participants become a conduit for the larger historical drama, for a history that cannot be possessed (Caruth, 2007).

Ara and I were in the midst of the ghosts of multiple traumas, intersecting and intertwining history and identity between us. Who did we each bring with us? Who else was present in the room in that moment of madness when I was suddenly transformed from analyst to the persecuted victim? She had spoken of Israel as a colonial oppressor, and I had responded as if my Jewish identity was being threatened, as if extinction was in the air. Had I not been able to bear an identification with the aggressor and so had shifted, absolutely seamlessly, into the position of victim? Was I carrying some cultural memory of victimization, something so inherent to being Jewish that the slide was without thought?

It was her history and my history and the histories of nations, of broken bonds and damaged victims suddenly all present in the space of a fleeting second. The coming into being of a subject is always a subject of history (Davoine & Gaudilliere, 2004). To think about psychoanalysis historically one has to incorporate the historical force of events that have been woven into the psychodynamics and identity of both analyst and patient to create subjects in history (Reis, 2005).

There is a link between the individual's little history, their personal history, and the big history of sociocultural contexts (Davoine & Gaudilliere, 2004).

I want to hold together, in tension, the micro and the macro, the little history and the big history, the drama of the encounter between Ara and me and between Palestinians and Jews. I am a Jew and she is an Arab. How do we come to know each other? How does recognition take place when the other is perceived as a threat? How much of our encounter will be infiltrated by present demons and the past ghosts of history?

I wanted to know Ara, to find my way through to a deeper understanding of her, to create a space within myself and in the room in which she could feel, despite my limitations that I was reaching her. I might have found myself in the midst of the Holocaust and the Middle East conflict and some confusion between them, but I did not want to remain there. I did not want to remain captive to the ghosts encircling us. I was aware that my investment was beyond that of an analyst trying to set the stage so that the work with a difficult patient could begin. The weight of history was bearing down on me as was the current hopelessness in the Middle East, all heightening my investment, intensifying the stakes.

My moment of madness passed without discussion and apparently without Ara aware, at any conscious level, of my turmoil. There was no antagonism or dissociation in the room. However, I do believe that my internal work shifted me, making me more aware of how much unconscious material I was carrying, which had an impact on our work, creating more space, letting air flow in. I knew that internalization, who and how we were to negotiate settling into each other and creating a habitable space, was the task at hand. I also knew, at some deep level, that acknowledging an identification with the aggressor, was going to be crucial for me.

As the work progressed I was trying to help her see the links between her history of trauma and her current struggles. We focused on her losses, especially of her father and later her mother. I wanted to bring some of her dissociated emotions and states of self back into the room (as I was doing with myself). She entered the territory with much anxiety. She began to come twice a week on a regular basis and immediately found it helpful. She continued to experience a newfound openness, and a transitional space evolved in which we could play more, use humor and our differences or misunderstandings became less weighted. In addition she became very ill, yet no definitive diagnosis could be found. We were both aware of the possible somatic expression of her psychic pain given that this was the first time she was processing her trauma. Our work was often the only place she ventured out to and the only thing she felt she was engaged in. My role shifted to one more directly maternal, and she responded by softening, allowing me to nurture her. She was showing me the vulnerable child, sometimes scared and alone. The transference deepened and shifted. I became the mother who could bear her pain, who was trying to understand her inner world, the mother who wanted to find her.

It became clearer that her struggles in her relationship with Joseph were linked to her deep fear of intimacy, which had a sadomasochistic aspect to it. She would experience his pursuit of her as beating her into submission. Eventually she would relent but feel humiliated at her need of him. She refused to discuss the sexual abuse other than letting me know it was with an older man who was a family friend. It remained another silent presence in the room.

Simultaneously as the work unfolded something strange was happening to me. After sessions I would find myself in front of the mirror in the bathroom. I would be staring at my own reflection. As I did so I realized I was attempting to distinguish our physical characteristics. Ara's eyes were definitely darker, I told myself, and her complexion was a shade or maybe even two shades more

olive, but her hair, her features, and the shape of her face were remarkably similar to mine. Although I thought her hair was a little longer, styled a little differently. I wasn't exactly sure. I would remind myself to look more closely at her next session. Lurking in otherness was a disconcerting sameness. So much has been written about the threat of the other, the other who is foreign, alien, and unknowable. The notion of otherness is based on that which is not the same and is therefore terrifying. Who was this other, who felt quite different, and yet was so physically familiar? What was it that I was seeing in her? I didn't know how much was her and what of me I was trying to find in her.

I needed to understand her more; as she was in the room with me and Ara as a subject in history. I started to immerse myself in Middle East history. I wanted a way into her world. Lebanon is a fascinating country. At the end of World War I the Ottoman Empire ceased to exist and France and Britain artificially created five Arab countries, Lebanon being one of them. Perched between East and West, Christian and Muslim, it is really a mosaic of many groups fatally split by religion, frozen in a political system bequeathed by French colonial powers and embittered by economic inequities and regional disparities. Adding to Lebanon's endemic problems has been the Palestinian movement's growing military and political might heightening issues of Arab nationalism and conflicting power struggles. Ara is a blend of Greek Orthodox, Sunni Muslim, Armenian, and Kurd, her own interesting mosaic mirroring that of Lebanon.

I started to imagine the history she carried with her. The humiliation of defeat was in the foreground. Pride was such a core value she had grown up with in her family. No matter their financial hardships they would never ask for help. She carried the loss of honor, Arab honor, and familial honor. It was never quite spoken but its presence was felt. The Palestinians embodied some of this. What the Israelis called the War of Independence in 1948 the Arabs referred to as al-Nakba, or the disaster, the catastrophe. It was simultaneously a Jewish victory and a major Arab defeat. The tragedy of the Palestinians began with 711,000 being forced to flee their homes.³ Israel, in their eyes, was another manifestation of Western imperialism, ravaging Arab nationalism, establishing itself on Arab soil. Palestinians were the symbol of great suffering—the deprived, displaced and violently repressed. They had lost their land and their identity; a great injustice yet to be redressed.

I carried with me a strong Jewish identity, but I had always had a very conflicted relationship to Israel, especially regarding its political positions. My maternal grandparents had left Lithuania in 1929 for South Africa. Except for two other family members all were killed in the Holocaust. My grandfather was a Talmudic scholar; he had spent 10 years, from 9 to 19, in a strict yeshiva in Lithuania that focused on ethics. Jewish studies was the center of his life. He did not believe that a good Jew was simply one who observed the rules and followed the letter of the law blindly. He abstracted the principles of morality, how to treat people with respect, whether Jew or non-Jew. He seemed to have developed his own quiet covenant with God. It was a lived covenant, not of books but of social justice, small acts of kindness. He would say over and over that righteousness and knowledge were the only attributes that could not be taken away. I knew what he meant. He would not talk about the Holocaust. He tore up his handwritten Yiddish poetry after 1945; words had lost all meaning.

As I write this piece, I feel my grandfather's presence. I do not want to question my Jewish identity, something he bestowed on me. I have always tried to keep it in the background, my least

³ Although there are different narratives of how the Palestinians left their homes I am specifically trying to enter and understand the view and narrative that Ara and many Arabs hold (as well as the new historians in Israel).

visible identity, yet it is core to who I am. Now I find myself haunted and torn. My work with Ara is forcing me to confront my conflicted Jewish identity and with it Jewish morality, pulling me right into the middle of the Middle East conflict, where I do not want to go.

The 20th century bequeathed the Jews two formative events—the Holocaust and the establishment of the State of Israel. In 1947 the United Nations approved the partition of the Mandate of Palestine into two states, one Jewish and one Arab. To understand modern Israel and its relationship to its Arab neighbors, one has to understand the Holocaust, which has always been present in Israel. The history of Israel as a nation is a history of trauma (Segev, 1993, Zertal, 2005). At the end of 1949, after Israel's independence, there were close to 350,000 Holocaust survivors living in Israel, constituting almost one out of every three Israeli's (Segev, 1993).

Initially the Holocaust was treated as a Jewish defeat, a disgrace, accompanied by feelings of disparagement towards European Jewry (Zertal, 2005). Its victims were censured for having let the Nazis murder them without fighting back (Segev, 1993). The “new man” of the Zionist dream carried a wish to begin anew, to reinvent himself and define his identity in direct opposition to the weak and humiliated (Segev, 1993). Many of Israel's fateful decisions across time were made in the shadow of the Holocaust with the threat of annihilation a constant undercurrent. A deep existential anxiety persists at the core of the nation.

Soon Arab leaders were being compared to Hitler. In Ben-Gurion's (1960) words, “When I listen to Nasser, it seems that Hitler is talking.” Ben-Gurion was terrified that the “Arab Nazis” would slaughter the Jews (Segev, 1993). In a letter to President Reagan in the 1980s, Begin explained that destroying Arafat's headquarters in Beirut (the very experience Ara had tried to describe to me) had given him the feeling that he had sent the Israeli army into Berlin to destroy Hitler in his bunker (Segev, 1993). Zertal (2005) claims that the transfer of the Holocaust situation on to the Middle East reality, which certainly was hostile but of a different order, intensified, and created a false sense of imminent danger.

I find myself trying to understand Israel, a small nation, surrounded by Arab states, besieged and traumatized, fiercely protecting its sovereignty. Did I as a Jew, carry the Holocaust with me, woven into my being the way Israel and the Holocaust are inseparably connected? Is the Jewish history of persecution and oppression such an inescapable force that without awareness, without a lived experience, it lingers on in me? How does history and psychodynamics come together, the social and intrapsychic, blurring distinctions between subject and object, them and us, me and her? Returning to the room, I seemed to be carrying a deep anxiety: Who would I be to her? Perhaps more pointedly, who was I to myself when facing her? What did I bring with me and what did I imagine she would see when she looked at me? Is that why I was struggling as I looked at myself in the mirror? Was I trying to make my otherness less so? Did I want to be more the same even as sameness was disturbing? If I was more same, would I see more Arab in the mirror, would I be less Jew, or would Arab and Jew blend, two Semites together? Was I trying to blur the images of perpetrator and victim as I stood before myself?

Some claim that Jews are undergoing a civil war, split into intense warring factions, but it is a civil war of conscience. And this dispute revolves around the stance taken in relation to the Palestinian/Israeli conflict. On one side Israel is positioned as ensuring the survival of the Jews, doing anything to prevent a second Holocaust (Ellis, 2002). On the other side are those who believe a transposition had taken place. Jews are treating the Palestinians in ways that they had once been treated (Ellis, 2003). Ellis (2002) suggested that post-Holocaust Judaism is grappling with new-found power in the U.S. and Israel while existing in a time warp, operating on the raw unconscious

terrain of the Holocaust and victimhood. What Jews have not faced in centuries is of being in the position of power. How does a traumatized people, acting under threat, whose identity is intricately linked with suffering come to terms with being powerful?

It seems an inordinately difficult feat, after carrying the weight of over 2,000 years of oppression, to be able to contemplate the implications of not only being in the position of power but also being in the position of victimizer, the oppressor. The claim to be the true victim is a major component of both Israeli and Palestinian national narratives (Morris, 1999) and core to their identities, while lack of mutual empathy has characterized the conflict from the beginning. Jessica Benjamin (2006) stated that what makes this victim position so compelling is the appeal of being righteously vengeful. Furthermore, there is a deep unconscious fear of being victimized. Held within the position of victim for Israel is the fear of annihilation, the legacy of the Holocaust, such that acts of aggression become confused with those of self protection (el Sarraj, as cited in Benjamin, 2006).⁴

It seems my anxiety in the first session was about my fear of having to confront what kind of a Jew I was. What does it mean to be a just Jew in a century of violence and appropriation? Is justice not based on compassion, on integrity, on a concern for human dignity and a willingness to fight for these values for Jews and non-Jews alike?⁵ I try to bring my grandfather back as I struggle to hold onto the basic ethical principles he taught me in how to treat the other. The paradox is that it is precisely as a Jew that I find my objections arise. It is through my Jewish identity that I understand victimization. I do now know how to reconcile being a Jew and oppressing, humiliating, systematically depriving the Palestinians of their homes, means of livelihood, access to education or health care.

And what I cannot speak so easily of is my need to defend Israel. Another reason I could not take in the words that Israel is a colonial-settler state is that a part of me does not want to believe that, a part of me, that despite everything, identifies with the Jews in the State of Israel. Somewhere deep I feel gratitude for a Jewish nation that protects the lives of Jews, for a home, even if it is not one I choose to live in, but a place of safety, a strong vibrant nation that will not allow another Jewish genocide to occur. And, perhaps, buried even deeper is my own identification with the aggressor and with Israel as the perpetrator.

As a white South African I have struggled with owning the role of aggressor, the colonizer (Suchet, 2007). I have explored my whiteness, a melancholic structure, as based in part on the disavowal of an identification with the oppressor, whether current or historical (Suchet, 2004a). And I have come to understand that this aggressor, the colonizer within, can never be shed, only disrupted over and over again. The haunting presence of dissociated aspects of self, in the complex web of multiple identities and subject positions, always finds its way back into the heightened intimacy of our consulting rooms. The ghosts of our psyche return. This time I was struggling to take in Jews as colonizers.

In our work Ara's assumption that I was Jewish was now accepted as fact between us.⁶ The historical and political remained specters hovering in the background. I did not always know how they were interrelated and when they would appear, but I was always aware of the presence of something greater than us. Then a confluence of events, some 2 years into our work, made it all

⁴I think how easily I moved from an identification with the aggressor to the victim position, replete with fears of annihilation without even having lived in Israel.

Based on principles of faith, Rabbis for Human Rights, September 1, 2006 (<http://www.rhi.israel.net>).

When I asked her permission to write about our work, she said affectionately, "It's the Jewish thing, isn't it?" by which she was referring to her early statement of hating all Jews and Israelis.

much clearer. Ara was finally beginning to acknowledge and address some of her sexual abuse experiences, and in the manner of the earlier cat-and-mouse dynamic I felt as if I was placed in the position of the abuser who would want more from her than she wanted to give, "forcing" her or figuring out ways of getting her to tell me. Then Gaza was invaded by the Israeli army.⁷ It was an extremely intense, traumatizing period. She identified with the Palestinians in Gaza and felt very angry with "Israeli aggression." There was a sense of horror, for us both, watching the devastation of the Palestinian civilian population, trapped and helpless, caught in the crossfire. Simultaneously, and completely unexpectedly, Ara was detained by the Department of Homeland Security for a long interrogation. Her interrogation was deeply disturbing, coming as it did when she felt that she couldn't just shut down as she would previously, our work had opened her, her feelings were all now accessible and the impact was enormous. I had "laid her bare."

She returned from the interrogation "broken," her poise, her forthrightness, her direct gaze were all gone. She felt she had been treated as a criminal, a terrorist, dehumanized and debased. Her deep commitment to justice and her integrity were all questioned. She felt indescribable hostility toward the female interrogator, bursting out in our session with "I hate fucking white people." Suddenly I knew in the transference that I was the aggressor. I felt as if I was the white interrogator, the Jewish/Israeli oppressor and the sexual abuser all in one. She had begun to talk about her childhood abuse, and suddenly she felt as if she was actually being tortured. I spoke of feeling in that moment that it was as if I was all the aggressor identities in relation to her. She nodded and was quiet. She could understand my position. She did not try to rescue me or attack me. She was surprised that I could be open and conflicted about what it meant to be Jewish, especially in that intense moment when trauma was in the room and erupting in the Middle East. She experienced my honesty as a relief. She could trust me more. Certainly I was much more than that to her. A space of reconciliation was emerging as we sat Jew and Arab in the room. We worked intensely. She was struggling to function. I had to hold, contain, and stabilize her. She temporarily started to take anxietytics for the first time in her life, to enable her to sleep and arrest the panic attacks. Slowly we put the broken pieces together.

Was it inevitable that I would be in the position of the aggressor? Given her self and other representations, given mine, given the trauma in the room, personal and historical, was it inevitable that it would all appear before us? If I had dismissed it, refusing to see myself as the aggressor, would the dynamic have been enacted in a different way? Would she have had to force me, perhaps through projective identification, into that position? Had the work I had done earlier on my own dissociation allowed me to now identify with this part of myself (which merged with her own aggressor introject)? That which remains unconscious and unacknowledged always finds its way into the room in the form of an unconscious process. What if it is conscious and acknowledged? We know, only too well, that in our work with childhood sexual abuse that the "analyst is always on the brink of becoming the abusing or abused other with the patient playing the complementary role" (Davies & Frawley, 1994, p. 50). Furthermore, according to Davies and Frawley, the patient and analyst must be free to reenact, in a fluid, ever-changing matrix, the internalized self and object relationships that will inevitably volley back and forth between them. I believe that is similar with historical trauma. We must struggle to gain access to that which is culturally dissociated, to that which feels unbearable, unsymbolizable and beyond reach, in both patient and ourselves. For only then will that allow for the movement of self and other representations to flow freely and pre-

Codenamed Operation Cast Lead, the invasion began on December 27, 2008, and ended on January 18, 2009. In the Arab world the Israeli-Gaza conflict is referred to as the Gaza Massacre.

vent a personal impasse that resembles and parallels the historical. In addition, recognition of responsibility (O. Guralnik, personal communication) whether personal or cultural, whether verbalized or internally processed, lays the groundwork for the working through of the many ghosts and specters that haunt our clinical space.

Being completely "undone" had many reverberations for Ara. She felt traumatized as she had been when her family was completely "undone." Simultaneously she was being treated as a "dangerous" Arab, a terrorist, an identification she found disturbing. We had to work through her conflicting emotions and identifications; her fear of becoming the aggressor, the terrorist (as her anger and wish for revenge emerged), as well as her humiliation at being the abused. Similarly we were able to talk about my conflicted identities including my identification with her traumatized self. The acknowledgment of our positions in history and in the room paradoxically opened the space. It freed us both from the limited positions of abused and abuser, colonizer and colonized. Open recognition and acceptance creates a space for working together, a reconciliatory and fluid space.

She had previously told me how much her feelings about Jews had shifted and how profound the very beginning of our relationship had been for her. She added that reading an online discussion of my paper on unconscious communication (Suchet, 2004b) confirmed for her what she felt in the room with me, that I was deeply and genuinely involved with my patients. That turned out to be very important and meaningful to her. The ability to be moved, to be touched, to allow oneself to enter the other and be entered reciprocally is the essence of our work and carries with it transformative potential. She felt this mostly during her "broken" phase. She had never gained access to her mother's mind or inner world and she had lost her father too young to remember being given access.

I have pondered long and hard for some way of understanding what happened between us that allowed for a deep and meaningful relationship and successful work. I think it is located right in the beginning as Ara claimed, right in the first few sessions. It is based on the capacity and willingness to take the other in, even if the other is the Other, the stranger, the foreigner. If I think about what she was communicating to me right at the start and based on her first two dreams, it was "I am looking for a Jew, although I will never acknowledge that, who will not beat me into submission, who will not humiliate me and although I am going to provoke and throw bombs, I do not want them to abuse me."

I know that she asked of me a capacity to actively contain (Winnicott, 1958), to mentalize (Fonagy et al., 2002) and a mindfulness (Wallin, 2007), a holding in mind our psychic spaces. Given my initial reaction to her critique of Israel we could so easily have remained in what Straker (2006) called the anti-analytic third, a noxious third that implicates our social and personal histories creating an ethos that opposes reflection and analysis, quite contrary to the third we speak so fondly of. We were both imbricated in a social discourse that predisposed us to see each other in socially stereotyped and mutually hurtful ways. So quickly the stage had been set by her first two dreams—perpetrator, victim, and even bystander all present in our small space. Who would she become and what roles would I take? Historically I was grappling with a modern Jewish dilemma, victim and oppressor, the formally colonized become colonizer—the Jew as powerful, the Jew as whitened sitting as analyst in New York City.

Instead something quite different unfolded. It was not only in the words but in the spaces between that meaning was communicated. At the procedural, pre-reflective level there was an interplay of unconscious minds, in our rhythms, tone and affect. It was an experience based, body-related knowing of the other (Ogden, Minton, & Pain, 2006). Mutual recognition begins with the early nonverbal experience of affective resonance (Benjamin, 2004) when one surrenders to the rhythm of the other and slowly in the mirroring, in the matching a co-created rhythm begins. I felt how

quickly she reached across to me, allowing our work to move her. She experienced a receptive mind, a receptive Jewish mind. At the reflective level, I needed to actively work to maintain a space of receptivity, to process my own ghosts so that what I could have in the room was not simply a repetition of the past. She has spoken at length of the experience in the first therapist's office; a tiny, long, narrow, dark space in which she felt cold and afraid and in which there had been a clear abuser/abused enactment that went unprocessed. The light was different in my office, she said, the space was more open, I didn't seem so far away and she was comforted by my quietness.

I do not believe that our psychic states are ever completely separate, especially while engaged in such powerful material. Our relational mindset of co-created realities, of states of mind influenced by each other seems to be borne out. I do believe she was able to access my psychic state, my receptivity to her, including perhaps the erotic dimension, which although never the dominant feeling added to the wish to create a different relationship with her. At times I approached, somewhat cautiously, her feelings towards me, which she would playfully deflect, while being able to say she that she was no longer terrified of "falling in love with her therapist," which I then found out was a fear of hers, since her best friend had struggled with this issue in her own treatment with her Jewish therapist.

I know I entered the work with trepidation, but I wanted to be a Jew who could have a deep and meaningful relationship with Ara, an Arab woman. I wanted to take her into my psychic space and allow myself to enter hers. I carried a deep wish for transcendence, even in the midst of ghosts of trauma and violence, in the midst of contradictory identities and political storms. I did not only want to be a colonizer; I sat quietly and listened. She did not only want to be the colonized; she was going to lead me and teach me what she needed and where to go. We were not simply victim and perpetrator in the room. We were not simply the oppressed with the oppressor. We were that and much more. We are never only subjects of discourse (Layton, 2002; Straker, 2006), we are never only hosts for the spectral presence of family figures, but subjects with unconscious and conscious desires including those of reparation and transcendence, desires to create a different inter-subjective space.

How do we find a way to an ethical stance in what feels like a quagmire of complex competing loyalties, competing identities, political and personal conflicts?

In my struggle to move towards the Other I was directed to the work of the philosopher Emmanuel Levinas (Levinas, 1969, 1987, 1990, 1998). As a Jew and French citizen who was captured by the Nazis he spent 5 years as a prisoner of war in a German labor camp where he grappled with understanding the relationship to the Other that would characterize his work for the next 50 years.

He endeavored to develop a moral form of relating to the Other by placing an obligation to the Other first before the self. His emphasis was on privileging the other and accepting their alterity, "the strangeness of the Other that is not reducible to the I, to my thoughts and my possessions" (p.43). Only through the act of putting the other first, allowing the kind of questioning an encounter with otherness can provide, can otherness persist (Rozmarin, 2007). Levinas (1969) did this in part through an "epiphany of the face" (p.71) in which metaphysical truth, transcendence, and infinity is incorporated. The face is not simply the representation of the other in their physical manifestation, but "the way in which the other presents himself, exceeding the idea of the other in me" (Levinas, 1969, p. 50). The "epiphany of the face qua face opens humanity" (p.213)⁸ and introduces a third party, the whole of humanity as observer in the eyes of the Other as they look at me.

⁸My thanks to Bruce Reis and Elizabeth Corpt for their suggestion.

Face-to-face relations is the term Levinas uses and was the title I had chosen for this paper before reading his work.

I am especially moved by Levinas's open and expansive search for a genuine encounter after his collision with the Holocaust (Mole,1997;Putnam, 2002; Stone, 1998); his own experience of victimization and the loss of his family.¹⁰

He was committed to finding an ethical position in relation to the other, to break the cycle of violence. By privileging the Other, by placing an obligation to the other first, Levinas concluded that justice must come before freedom.

The essence of Levinas is resisting the desire to reduce the other to the self. For Levinas recognition is not about knowing oneself but rather submitting oneself to a morality, to a transcendent experience that is beyond the self "introducing into me what was not in me" (Levinas, 1969, p. 203).

However, to be capable of a transcendent and otherwise than Being experience, requires a knowing of the self. Furthermore, when we are in the midst of multiple traumas that weave their way through history into our psyches, when identifications and subject positions slide so quickly between us, it is inevitable that we will encounter a disrupted self. To maintain a habitable space for the Other asks of us a similar receptivity towards our own internal otherness or our "other" selves.

"The other is marked by difference, otherwise it would not be genuinely 'other,' but this difference is not just external to the subject; it is right there at its unconscious core" (Frosh, 2002, p.402). It is often internal otherness, the radical otherness of the unconscious, an unconscious that always remains somewhat alien and foreign, that decenters us (Laplanche, 1997). I do believe we must hold in tension the internal and the external, the other within and the Other before us, both of which can be beyond our grasp, de-centering the experience of recognition.

It is only through that deep acceptance of the other(s) within the self that the Other across the room can be seen for who they are. The task seems to demand trying not to make the Other more same while not making the same more other, my struggle in the mirror. Only then can we remain in the type of internal experience that Levinas (1969) referred to as a welcoming of the Other, a transcendence, introducing and opening one to something far beyond the self.

I now see Ara's face as quite different from mine, yet so familiar. I wait for her smile as she seats herself, her careful glance to determine my state of mind, her sigh as she settles herself in her comfortable place and then her quirky greeting. A new session begins.

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¹⁰His parents, his in-laws, and both siblings were killed.

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