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Gazing under fire –About a relational psychodynamic third position in times of war

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Abstract

In recent times of war, propaganda and hate unlocked strong psychological defenses such as splitting, projection, or denial, both at the individual and the societal level. The objective of this paper is to re-introduce psychoanalysis as an almost forgotten worldview of humanistically informed science in the discussion about collective reactions to war. Psychoanalytic concepts of the gaze will be connected to intergroup phenomena characterizing times of war, such as hatred or resistance. The popular psychoanalytic metaphor of "thinking under fire", which refers to being able to think in highly stressful situations, will be applied to our visual appropriation of the world in the era of social media. The metaphor of "gazing under fire" will be developed and embedded in the communication in times of fake, fragmented, and radicalized *Weltanschauungen*. A psychoanalytic position of the "third", which looks beyond toxic polarization will be claimed as a basic tool that overcomes dichotomies and essentialist ethnocentric political world views. This position can be reached by acknowledging both one's own guilt as well as the others` pain, despite the primacy of historical and social contextualization of collective suffering. Informed by the psychoanalytic basic principles of communication and treatment, this paper will potentially contribute to the relevance of psychoanalytic concepts for humanities as well as the intellectuals` psychic flexibility in times of war.

Keywords: psychoanalysis; the third position; humanistic science; looking under fire.

Gazing under fire – About a relational psychodynamic third position in times of war

> *"It [the war] hurls down in blind rage whatever bars its way, as though there were to be no future and no peace after it is over. It tears asunder all community bonds among the struggling peoples and threatens to leave a bitterness which will make impossible any re-establishment of these ties for a long time to come"* (Freud, 1915, p. 12).

In times of crises, intellectuals are too easily trapped in adhering rigidly to their established values and ideas, defending them against the other`s supposedly inferior perspectives. The results can be seen impressively in social media discourses, tweets, slogans, declarations of solidarity and condemnation. There is a strong tendency that conversations mainly reach the benevolent ears of the in-group, of those already convinced and seldomly journeying outside their own area of experience, with a risk of the realities of others being patronized. The respective starting points, the narrative that one chooses, are too divergent to have any common ground. In times when the real-time documentation of cruelties via photography and videos made by their victims as well as by the perpetrators are more available for the broad public than ever, the individual sensitivities and ideologies of those consuming them are highly context-dependent and emotionally charged. On the one hand, videographic footage seems to be objective as it portrays what is happening right now in reality, while on the other hand, the many choices the videographer makes e.g. the frame, the angle of the video, the duration, remain subjective even to the extent of the possibility of creating a "faked" reality. The chosen narrative is the driving force that determines how pictures are interpreted. This might lead to a stabilization of our own identity and creation of divisions against other communities at the same time. The liberal agenda of autonomy underlying various fragmented identity groups lead to a feeling of irreconcilable opinions, as well as to a global retreat of a universal anthropological cohesion and

humanistic *Weltanschauung*, much needed to survive the many global challenges such as the climate crisis.

In the following, the metaphor of *gazing under fire* will be derived by psychoanalytic observations of the psychosexual development of gaze as well as the intersubjective experiences, that shape its appearance and result in its inaccessibility in times of war and hate. Differences between the look and the gaze will be determined. Subsequently, the metaphor will be applied specifically to the Israeli-Palestinian context. Ideas about inner and outer resistance to war will be developed. The early dictum by Ferenczi (1988) "without sympathy no healing" will be proven relevant beyond individual suffering. Without maintaining sparks of empathy for others, despite the dominance of one's own suffering, one will stay stuck in traditional approaches and discourses. The analytic position of the third, the "negative capability", interferes with hate and correlated belief systems. In critically acknowledging one's own aggressive potential and guilt by turning the look at others to a mutual empathic gaze, communication might become possible.

1 What a gaze can be about

The subjective experience of a mutually-held gaze is one of the most profound social encounters, measured by the emotionality it has the potential to evoke in the gazer. This effect goes beyond the individual psychological layer. The many writings of philosophers and poets prove its cultural transmission, and one can find the reverberations of the emotionality of the gaze replicated in visual and written cultural artefacts such as in the tales of Oedipus, Medusa or Narcissus.

Apart from its biological roots, according to which the human`s ability to look is simply understood as the ability to visually perceive and as a means of attention, its psychological meaning strikes from the beginning of life. While early phenomenological approaches argued that seeing comes before words (Berger, 1980), today it is common sense that seeing is always, and from the beginning of life influenced by its

social environment. Through our eyes we establish contact with the outer world. We create meaning and it is via the encounter of another's gaze that we meet the other meeting us (Heron, 1970). The importance of a child being seen by the primary caregiver for healthy human development is well known from findings from infant research. Gaze plays an important role in emotional regulation, as well as the social learning function of children. Of course, there is more to the gaze then serving as a prerequisite for learning: It is a part and expression of our core self (Stern, 1985; Stern, 1974). Through the direction and duration of our gaze we regulate our emotions: eyes and gazes can express all basic emotions, including fear or aggression (Ekman and Friesen, 1974) as well as interactional emotions such as sexual desire, flirting, love (Bolmont et al., 2014, Bolmont et al., 2017), challenging and competing (Argyle et al., 1974), power relations (Hall et al. 2005), dominant and submissive behavior (Tang & Schmeichel, 2015) or shame and embarrassment (Modigliani, 1971). Riemer (1955) went as far as to classify the "abnormalities" of the gaze by defining pathological gazing as not being able to distinguish between appropriate and non-appropriate gazing behavior, whereas ordinary social interactants have an intuitive sense of appropriateness. Extended gazing periods occur particularly in aggressive or libidinal exchanges. Here, a mutual gaze can dissolve the difference between subject and object temporarily. To reduce intimacy on the other hand people prefer to avoid eye contact e.g. in crowded elevators to preserve the individual space from being intruded on by others. Gazing behavior is influenced by many other factors than direct interpersonal relationships e.g., by the gazer`s personality (Mehrabian, 1972) or by power and status differences (Argyle and Dean, 1965). In recent years, gaze has been further conceptualized in connection with identities e.g. heterosexual and homosexual gazes, the "imperial" or the "transatlantic" gaze (Manlove, 2007, p. 84) or the "colonial" gaze. Here, individual behavior is seen through a lense of the broader social context, precisely the opposite to the psychoanalytic inductive perspective, which transfers individual defense mechanisms to collective reactions.

2 Gazing in psychoanalysis

With the onset of psychoanalysis, Freud avoided a mutual gaze with his patients by asking them to lay on the couch, stating that he could not deal with "being stared at by others for eight hours a day" (Freud., 1913, p. 131). To access regressive conflicts and fantasies by talking, the mutual gaze between physician and patient was no longer possible. First stated in his treatises on sexuality, Freud relates gazing to the pleasure principle, a classic drive-theoretical approach.

> "Visual impressions remain the most frequent pathway along which libidinal excitation is aroused. ... It is usual for most normal people to linger to some extent over the intermediate sexual aim of a looking that has a sexual tinge to it.".
>
> (Freud, 1922, p. 156)

"*Schaulust*" serves Freud namely as a juxtaposition to hysterical blindness, and an explanation for his psychogenic explanation of hysteria. Subsequently, Melanie Klein and other ego-psychoanalysts stressed the importance of the child`s physical connection to the mother for the child`s individuation process. Klein understood the gaze to be a mediator of that early relationship. Concepts of self and other in the gaze were later prominent in the writings of Lacan (1977). Inspired by phenomenological approaches like Merleau-Ponty (1962), he states the pre-existence or reversibility of the gaze. Gazing is not one-dimensional, as we are at the same time subject and object of our own gaze. We see only from one point, but are seen in our existence from everywhere (ibid.). The gaze represents the object of desire and is furthermore the central operator of the mirror stage and constitutive for the self. "Reality needs to be ordered by formal structures before we can even conceive it" (Heimann, 2022, p. 710). Through gazing in the mirror, and the identification with the whole image in it (which is the very bodily ego that Freud has declared in "the Ego and the Id" (Freud, 1923), the ego of the child begins to form. Before identification with a caregiver as an essential part of the social development is possible, one needs to experience a feeling of difference (in contrast to fusion) to the object. The interaction

with the other is essential for the child to develop a self. The mirror is not just a reflection of our physical selves, but the insight that, if we can see ourselves, others can also see us. This form of being observed by the imagined other is of primary importance for our self-awareness and being. The gaze as one operation in this mirror function is an essential part of human desire. Gazing towards another object marks our object of desire. The subject desires to be desired by the other. The gaze of the other is always present, even if the subject is alone. Thus, the gaze cannot be tied to a specific real person gazing, but is always influenced by one's own fantasies about the other seeing us. Since the 1970s, and with the growing popularity of infant-observation research as part of an intersubjective and inter-relational psychoanalytic framework, the topic of mutual gazing gained popularity. Starting off with the famous still-face-paradigm (Tronick et al., 1978), today there exists an ample amount of literature on gaze avoidance in infants towards their mothers and later on their psychoanalysts. This is mostly interpreted as early psychological defense mechanisms to regulate distress as experienced in the caregiving situation (Coswill, 2000; Salomonsson, 2016; 2021). Intersubjective theories focus on encounters and relationship experiences in early life and how they form our way of being with others in adulthood. If an early narcissistic vulnerability or oral deficiency comes into play, then one is susceptible to counter-movements such as aggression and anger. In general, the couch setting and the elimination of the mutual gaze in psychoanalysis intensifies deliberately the gaze inwards, the introspection that is necessary for working through psychologically relevant conflicts. At the same time, fantasies and projections towards the imagined quality of the gaze of the analyst intensify. Both aim at the emergence of the second, unconscious layer of conversation, the psychoanalytic mise-en-scene guided by inner conflicts. The same principle is true for the collective, instead of acting-out negative emotions towards the outside, a society will not overcome their collective trauma whithout a working-through of the traumatic past (LaCapra, 2001). Too often, this gaze is blurred by hate.

3 The look of hatred

> *"The man who first flung a word of abuse at his enemy instead of a spear was the founder of civilization."* (Freud & Breuer, 1893)

Violence is a universal human reaction to our innate human dependence, and the "manner in which we are "given genders or social categories, against our will and subjectivized in the context of the repetition of insistencies that construct us according to the dictates of power" (Butler, 2009, p. 167). While Butler's conceptualization as humans is mired in violence from the beginning, other authors, mainly humanistically informed, do not conceptualize violence as an innate human trait. Violence occurs exclusively as a reaction to the failure of needs, and is only indirectly referred to in the context of power or violation of autonomy. Through its many diverse appearances, hate is an existential part of our human condition, psychoanalytically rooted in the destruction-seeking "Thanatos" drive. At least since Winnicott's work on "Hate in the countertransference" (1994), intersubjective, ego —and self— psychoanalysts are convinced that hate is necessary for the psychosexual development, for self-realization and even as a therapeutic tool to work-through in therapies.

The psychologically most relevant division is the one between hate directed towards the outside and a hate that is directed inside. When aggression is absent or turned inwards, the death drive energy is transformed into depressive stagnation and indifference instead of being channeled towards the other person. This can be expressed either in a hostile attitude, or in resignation and depression, and in the most extreme form, in suicide. Anger is a vital force, whereas depression is the opposite. Resentment can be understood as a mixed form between inside and outside hatred. In war, hate is mainly male and loud – war as a man`s game (Virginia Woolf), women are rather the bystanders and victims of male aggression. Theweleit (2015) referred to the worst cases of the male desire to kill as "free floating SS-men". He mentions Anders Breivik, '..the Norwegian neo-Nazi terrorist, who saw himself as a healer cleaning the world, a recurrent fantasy in transfigurations of ter-

ror attacks of individuals. There are some psychological characteristics that differentiate hate from anger (Fuchs, 2021; Blass, 2019). In hating someone, the other holds a very powerful position. The absolute wish to destroy the other occurs alongside a form of self-emptying and is destructive. A more constructive form of anger could be self-defensive, includes fantasies of superiority, of wishing oneself a better life (a progressive feeling) versus hate that is directed towards annihilation, destruction, and powerlessness (a destructive feeling). The more persistent the feeling of injustice, the more likely it is to experience hate. Hate is an obsession, a progressive self-poisoning directed towards one's soul. The greater one's own suffering, the more inadequate and difficult the endeavor is to move from a projective position (which sees the guilt and fear in others) to a depressive position (which mourns one`s own shortcomings). In direct contact between hostile parties (in a manner similar to libidinal contacts), the gaze is attached to the object as if in a form of perversion. The hater cannot let go of the powerful object he or she hates and wishes to destroy. This is specific to the psychoanalytical approach to hatred: it is not so much about the object of hatred itself, but about inner reasons and vulnerabilities in the person who hates. In the concept of destructive narcissism, hate can be understood as a form of traumatic re-enactment. The relationship between trauma and hate lies in the victim perpetrator reversal. In hatred, the aggressor is the strong character, and the weak target is despised. Hating is the reversal of weakness into strength that makes the individual feel (temporarily) strong. Instead of turning the gaze inwards by facing narcisstic injuries in oneself, the gaze turns towards the outside, the other is devaluated and the own position stays untouched.

4 Hate and trauma in the Israeli-Palestinian context

How does hatred manifest itself in a country in which both parties are socialized with a narrative in which they are "victims" –and, of course, are too often indeed real victims from one side or the other– feeling hindered in their aspirations for advancement and furthermore feel united in the feeling of being devalued worldwide? What about a society such

as that of the Palestinians, who have been deprived of their own space since the Nakba in 1948, or the Jews, who had to search for their destroyed space anew after the Shoah? The specific historical and social consistent traumatic Israeli-Palestinian context is susceptible to hate, projections, identity negotiations in both gruops. Here, social experiences of flight and migration, as well as individual experiences of impediment, enter a disastrous resonating relationship, reinforcing each other. The experience of collective violence results in living in an ongoing survival mode (Chemtob et al., 1988). Such a mode is defined in terms of a cascade of neurobiological responses that make the organism ready for the fight-flight response as well as for bonding (Brom, 2014). In existential threatening situations, attachment to benevolent authority is an essential survival mechanism (compare the early infant and caregiver situation). At the same time, just as the attachment is strong, there is a parallel tendency to reject people perceived to be hostile or not part of the in-group (ibid.). Violence could be even used to assert that one's own view of the world is the correct one. As violence is justified as a moral act, one demonstrates that one's own normative claims are justified. Shared hate can further serve as a strong foundation for group identities and there is limited capacity to look beyond a benevolent versus hostile dichotomy.

As noted earlier, hatred arises precisely in the gap where the individual does not find its place to develop, where personal mortification and unresolved mourning occur. The ongoing traumatic environment of violence constitutes a victim state of mind, with paranoid-schizoid mechanisms (Hollander, 2015). Both Israeli Jews and Palestinians suffer the psychological consequences of occupying a position of victimhood, a psychic state that tends to produce diminished self-esteem, a defensive grandiosity, wishes for revenge, a need for compensation resulting from feelings of entitlement, and the splitting of good and evil between self and other that prevents empathy (Hollander, 2015, p. 64). Defenses against mourning (or the depressive position) often include identification with the aggressor, personified in belligerent and bellicose political leaders or organizations that can protect the group from (re)experiencing the humiliation of powerlessness (Falk, 2004). The similarities be-

tween the too similar "brothers" –the Jewish and Palestinian people– are described often. Both suffer from deep narcissistic injuries, driven by the compulsive repetition of trauma and intergroup dynamics, both strongly attached to their respectively claimed homeland and eventually leading to fratricide. Today, these similarities might be seen as a cliché, and yet are more accentuated. Both Palestinians and Israelis are in a status of massive trauma, which intensifies the feeling of being victimized. The Palestinian people are categorized as being the "victim of the victim" or being in a state of "competing victimhood" (Shnabel & Noor, 2012), a competition about being the "true" victim. and proposing. Another conceptualization, the "chosen trauma" (Volkan, 2007), describes the identity-forming state of mind of a people through the trauma that was passed on through generations before who fought in this land. The clinging on to the "chosen trauma" of ancestors could be understood as a (often unintended or unconcscious) resistance to peace, especially when violence is involved as the projection of one`s own and collective vulnerability as mentioned before. Again, hatred is an (illusionary) way to compensate for humiliated self-esteem, because one's own group appears superior and unique in comparison to the devaluated group of the other. Hate consists of a reversal: at the root of hate lies humiliation, loss of honor, and loss of face, devastating experiences that threaten self-esteem. Collectively speaking, hatred towards the outside serves a rescue function in which aggressive energies are released. The threat of self-destruction is transferred to the destruction of the other. Fatally, the two hostile parties need each other to stabilize their identity and world views. Next to trauma, hate can also be passed on to future generations if not —as a first step— active *gazing under fire* is practiced, later followed by actions of a needs-based-model of reconciliation which could have the goal of breaking the cycle of competition.

5 Gazing under fire

The concept of "thinking under fire" was coined by the psychoanalyst Wilfred Bion (1962) who suffered himself from posttraumatic conditions after his experiences as a tank commander in the First World war.

Ever since, it has been a popular metaphor for describing the rising emotional pressure and intensive feelings experienced by therapists during the real-time treatment of their patients, with the task of both containing these emotions in themselves, as well as reacting adequately to those of their patients. The willingness to allow the deepest and most frightening aspects of a patient's inner world to emerge in the encounter (Bion, 1967a) is also described as a "negative capability". This capability entails entering into the encounter with the patient with "no memory no desire" (Bion, 1967b), to immerse oneself in the reverie of the moment, and to not be too influenced by preexisting theory or prejudice. This process aims to deepen the engagement with whatever is in the patient's mind during the therapeutic encounter. Thus, it might be so difficult for psychoanalysts to comment on political topics because they are used to being in this observing, reactive and distanced position. In the following, the metaphor of gazing under fire will be applied to the war situation, where we as observers are forced to look and testify the atrocities being committed.

As mentioned before, in war and trauma, early defense mechanisms such as splitting, denial and projection are effective. Those are driven by the existential fear (Rosenfeld, 1971) which the traumatic event arouses to an intolerable extent. It is extremely hard for those immediately affected and traumatized to be empathic to the pain of the other side, exactly because the level of one's own suffering is so high, and it occupies the whole mind in thinking and feeling. Although the level of empathy increases with the magnitude of pain of each individual, there is no increase in empathy regarding the number of people suffering (Gordon-Hecker et al., 2024). This is refered to as the singularity effect: paradoxically, the level of empathy a single (identified) victim attracts more empathy than a group of victims (Kogut & Ritov, 2005). Beyond individual empathic responses, the regressive pull of war further sweeps us in large group dynamics. Just as at the individual level, one's primitive (narcissistic) vulnerability can be externalized in group conflicts (Volkan, 2007). Well known are Bion's "basic-assumption-groups" (1961), characterized by the basic assumptions of fight or flight (group unites to fight against or flee from), pairing groups (wish

for pairing of two separate parties) and dependency groups (submission under an omnipotent leader). Bion judges the behavior of the groups as a regressive defense against psychotic and "dreadful" fears, feeling helpless in a dependent regressive position. These group states are highly influenced by Freud's group psychology and the analysis of the Ego, where the masses lose their individual ego and instead, affected by the masses` emotions, narcissistic libido is transferred to an idealized leader. Also, in Bion's conceptualization, a leader ("a father figure") unites the groups with different individual positions towards this leader.

For bystanders, for persons not identifying with one of the groups or a leader, such as media consumers who watch hate crimes on social media, the risk is high of experiencing shock and shame looking at pictures without being able to do something about the helplessness provoked. This kind of looking could produce a feeling of voyeurism. Also the felt sense of vulnerability is very high when confronted with traumatic situations, and might be easily projected on the other by intergroup processes. On the other hand, those standing outside the immediate war situation are also able to take on the psychoanalytic third perspective. A psychoanalytic-informed search for meaning and understanding should not be considered as a form of escapism with regard to political or personal moral responsibility. Instead of patronizing reality from an ivory tower, genuine conversations depend on mutual recognition. Ideally, this position will not lead to simplistic answers, but rather reveal complex and ambivalent answers which hold different truths at the same time. In the dictum of Segal (1987) "Silence is the real crime", simply looking without taking the other`s perspective into account, could lead to a silencing of opinions.

But how is it possible to resist these projections, to remain psychologically flexible, to serve one's own values in a way of moral integrity, but to also respond to new developments and the present moment, by looking at the pain of those holding different values? This is certainly a "moral struggle" (Butler, 2009), but possible such as in Butler`s concept of cohabitation. Although the subject always lives on occupied ground, we have the same entitlement by virtue of living on this planet. Regard-

ing the third position, the struggle means to bei empathic, to transform destructive hate to constructive anger. In cases of strong hatred, foregoing revenge is necessary. These processes of mutual recognition are oriented and bound in time, and can take place only when two are open to looking at each other. The intimacy of the intellectual encounter in times of war entails a risk of being shamed. The moment someone is seen and beheld (in their fears, angers, difficulties), the person becomes visible in terms of his or her lack. On the other side of the risk of being shamed by a devaluating response, stands the gain of opening, the gain of being recognized and acknowledged, despite and with our lack, as established by the intimacy accompanying the mutual gaze. The concept of empathy serves not only as a metaphor for (un)-conscious interpersonal resonating processes, but can be understood as a broader anthropological organizing principle, one that has a fundamental social orientation. By reflecting on one's own deficiencies, looking can turn to a gaze, and activity becomes possible.

6 Inner and outer resistance

As introduced in the case of the Middle East conflict, a strong underlying position of inferiority from both narratives is claimed, which leads to a neurotic, paranoid position of mutual distrust and separation. "In the Israeli-Palestinian dyad, both sides feel themselves victims of the other. In this case, resolving their respective recognition needs through mutual accountability is a barrier" (Heifetz, 2023, p. 69). Resistance to working through conflicts in psychoanalysis, and resistance to political conflict by actions, at first glance seem to be two entirely different processes. Resistance as a psychoanalytic terminus refers to the (inner) unwillingness to work through inner conflicts, about the ambivalence of the wish to change, versus the fear of change, of the wish to stay as you are, to close, to hide, to withdraw from contact and protect yourself from disappointed expectations. "Resistance (…) evokes a certain opposition to power – here, that of the analyst – but in a context in which progressive change is the object of that power; which is to say, resistance means closing down, refusing to think, blocking insight, turning away"

(Frosh, 2015, pp. 389-390) or, in other words, resistance is "the mind at war with itself, blocking the path to its own freedom" (Rose, 2007). In political and historical terms, resistance is clearly an outer struggle, directed towards an enemy, an idea and specific persons personifying the disdained system. As a side note, the term "Jihad" refers actually to both an inner and an outer struggle.

Since the development of object-relational psychoanalytic theory however, inner conflicts and outer actions relate to each other in the intersubjective matrix of relationship organization. The most well-known statement might be the sentence "there is no such thing as a baby" by Winnicott (1960). The baby exists only due to the interaction with its mother in a "nursing complex". We evolve our personality by introjecting our experiences with other objects, by identifying and demarcating not in a void, but always with and against someone else. In addition, resistance in the post-colonial context can be understood only in terms of the very existence of the other for the definition of oneself. "Resistance is always defined through the negation of the entity at which it directs itself, forming itself by way of negation with reference to (the abusing) authority. This negative core means that resistance cannot be total because it is always defined by its object. Destroy the object, and you have destroyed the resisting subject as well." (Hadar, 2016, p. 334). This is the whole tragedy of the intractable Israeli-Palestinian conflict, as the identities are constructed in demarcation form one another. The price for the recognition of the pain of the other includes the risk of threatening one's own position of suffering (Kahanoff, 2015), cognitive and identity consistency (Bar-Tal, 2014) and might even be a threat to identity, that is build on asymmetrical constructions. Just one example of that asymmetrical relationship is that of language, where the dominance of Hebrew in the public sphere shapes the cultural landscape one-sided or the narrative of the Palestinians being the indigineous people in Palestine, therefore jewish people are a foreign colonizing body. The gain of recognition of the other side as symmetrical in its potential for immediate and long-term transformation of hate to mutuality. This path will of course (like in many other examples such as in the case of South Africa) lead through resistance of those who prefer to benefit

from the asymmetrical power relationships. In psychological treatment, resistance is a way of understanding something about inner conflicts, about what needs to be resisted against, about what a person is precisely afraid of by transformation. Frosh (2015, p. 390) applies this powerful tool to the political context by stating that resistance

> "has to involve an opening as well as a refusal. The refusal is of the structures of power as they are naturalised in their self-presentation; the opening is the turn towards the reality of the other and of the situation, however alarming and threatening it may be."

By focusing on the colonial context the "perverse relationship" between dominating and dominated subjects and the enactment of "otherness" is implied in the asymmetrical encounter. "Enactments of otherness, therefore, are symptoms, products, and manifestations marked by historic imbalances, exhibited by those involved in unequal albeit regularized inter-subjective relations" (Sheehi & Sheehi, p. 83). The authors endorse an anti-oppressive psychoanalytic praxis inspired by Frantz Fanon and others, who worked on decolonial psychology. From this perspective, eurocentric practice serves exclusively those already privileged. Palestinian mental health is in a constant battle to work to personal and collective dis-alienation and self-realization under and against settler colonialism. In addition, "the Palestinian people appeared (…) in need of both a process of self-liberation and social liberation, because it is difficult to work through internal repression when one cannot effectively work through external repression" (Jabr & Berger, 2016, p. 28). Decolonial authors never tire of stressing that the dialogue between Palestinians and Israelis is somehow doomed to fail, e.g. due to the destructiveness of the colonial introjections of the Palestinians, or the impossibility for Israelis to give up their position as "good Israelis". The extractive introjections (an outer attribution that has been internalized) occur in dialogue because the Palestinian "carries" both the individual and the collective responsibility for their culpability of existence, their resistance, and their desire. Due to this fixation on narrowing the arguments, this framework might (unwillingly) be perpetuating a white and

black perspective and patronizing the victims.

The concepts of *reconciliation* or *recognition* might bridge psychoanalysis and post-colonial theory or identity politics. In psychoanalysis, the aim is to liberate the subject from repression, from being unaware of what is going on inside his or her psyche, while post-colonial theory is about liberating the subject from the oppressor and the state of oppression. Interestingly, both psychoanalysis and post-colonial theory are concerned with the question of how to rehabilitate the subject after injury (Hadar, 2016, p. 332). The path to dialogue between the two sides involves good internal objects. As a first step, this is a prerequisite for working against destructive introjections, e.g. family and social cohesion in Palestinian society as a resource. Recognition depends on others, on the feeling to be recognized in work, familial and private relationships (Honneth) but it also depends on the work on the self, such as in the concept of self-determination (Hegel) or education to modernity (Adorno).

In regard to collective trauma, recognition of the pain and the trauma of the two conflicted groups is a precondition for a possible reconciliation process. Consequently, in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, a recognition of the Nakba would be essential not only for Palestinians but for Israeli society, who surpresses or denies this part of the history in favor of the dominant chosen trauma of the Shoah. Such a recognition could have a profound transformation impact (Benjamin, 2011).

7 A psychoanalytic position of the third

> *Do I contradict myself? Very well then I contradict myself, (I am large, I contain multitudes)* **(**Walt Whitman**,** *Song of Myself***,** 51, 1855**)**

How does the third position concern the intellectual`s writing in times of war? In the void that vanished religious and spiritual power has left us in the 21st century, the search for morality is difficult. Political speech and academic speech are strongly intertwined, especially as, for many scholars, their subject of study is (conscious or unconsciously) entangled with their identity and result in a specific *Weltanschauung.* In the October 7 massacre in Israel, the paranoid transgenerational transmission and stimulation of the biggest fear of the annihilation of Jews since the Holocaust came true –another realization of a psychotic cosmos. "Many Jewish Israelis are moved to rigidify their defenses –psychological, geographic, and military– so as to avoid the experience of passivity in the face of threat." (Hollander, 2015, p. 61). The unfolding of the ongoing cruel war in Palestine and the large number of killed Palestinian civilians, the collective repression of acknowledgement, and witness to the collective trauma of the return of the repressed trauma of the Nakba now in the current war is so overwhelming, that the Palestinian suffering also "inhibits their motivation to negotiate with an adversary whose intentions are experienced as dishonorable" (Hollander, 2015, p. 61). Although both collective traumatic events are not comparable, both left both their traces in the collective memory and are constantly overwritten and regenerated because the traumatic reality is ongoing. Posttraumatic responses are in general ascribed to the victims, but history shows that the perpetrating side also suffers from its violent past. Not acknowledging and repressing the Nakba can be seen as a symptom of collective perpetrator trauma (the Israeli side), that reveals itself in certain social symptoms like still used Arab names for places that were uprooted in the public sphere (Even-Tzur, 2016). Analysis of the current situation that are connected to the traumatic past, metaphors such as "Gaza being a Ghetto that is being liquidated now" (Gessen, 2023) leave a strong impression and imprint, accentuating the perpetrator-victim dialectic instead of acknowledging that both sides are both victims

as well as perpetrators. Although there are real asymmetries of power (compare the numbers of innocent civilians killed on both sides of a war), every single injury needs to be equally respected. The slightly optimistic lesson that can be learned from treating patients is that one cannot compare suffering and that empathy can be cultivated. Every person feels individual pain, pain that is not comparable to that of others. The only way out of each side`s chosen trauma as a collective is "neither obvious nor easy. Having compassion for the other side's trauma means paying a price for one`s own stability and world view. Such sensitivity demands taking risks. Engaging directly with the sensitivity requires making peace with the past by becoming accountable, by facing oneself as both victim and victimizer. It requires slowly and stepwise taking more risks to counter one's sensitivity and false perceptions of safety and truth —the truths of our beliefs, beliefs upon which our identities are built" (Heifetz, 2023, p. 69).

"The 'third' is a psychological position that transcends all the basic oppositions of 'them and us' or 'doer and done-to' by recognizing that we all contain all opposites" (Benjamin, 2004). Specifically, the moral third is the position from which the violations of lawful behavior and dehumanization can be witnessed or repaired. It is a fragile position, hard for both individual and collectives to maintain. It is from the position of the moral third that we acknowledge violations, suffering, indignities, and the debasing of some humans to elevate others. What makes that position of acknowledgment possible? What prevents it? We must admit that we observe in ourselves continually the breakdown and restoration of the capacity to hold the connection with suffering, including our own" (Benjamin, 2015, p. 7).

In her essay "Thoughts on Peace in an Air Raid", Virginia Woolf (1940) urges her readers to imagine peace and the psychosocial conditions that make it sustainable, amid war. If people are capable of being imaginative, there will be no war. This might sound naïve, yet the power of imagination is a creative force that counters the destructiveness of hate. At last, the function of the "third position" could be to not give up the hope that a paranoid-schizoid position can be transformed into a depres-

sive one. Just as transgenerational trauma exists, transgenerational reconciliation is possible. To be able to come into the depressive position, one must accept feelings of guilt and remorse that are completely denied by large group processes (such as devaluing the inferior other and idealizing the own group, seen on both sides of the conflict). Psychic recovery and flexibility mean to identify with something other than the lost object. Neutrality or abstinence that is appropriate in the clinical setting, does not fit when encountered with large group dynamics (Kemp, 2011). Instead, a "universalism" is needed that acknowledges the pain of the other. But "thinking with feeling" as well as "gazing under fire" requires taking on the other side's pain. It involves acknowledging harm inflicted by each side on the other —reconstructing narratives to name the unnamable and building upon common values. It involves making the 'Other" more like "us" to avoid the common conclusion that those who are not "us", are not like 'us' and therefore endanger us (Ahmed, 2014).

Returning to the potential of a psychoanalytic approach to understand a political conflict, the internal struggle or the inner resistance against too convenient thinking is forced. "Psychoanalysis accounts for the capacity to resist by stressing the inevitable divisions within the self that reflect an ambivalent relationship to authority. Agency can be mobilized to uproot internalized versions of hegemony that reproduce the inequities of the social world." (Hollander, 2015, p. 73). As Žižek puts it, the subject comes into being when interpellation is resisted (cited by Ruti, 2014). Ultimately, by giving up the depressive position and speaking in praise of confusion with ambivalent, mixed identities and multitudes, we arrive at hybrid subjectivities and intersubjective relationships (Bhabha, 1994). Thoughts about "a time after" might not yet be realized and are pointed to future directions. After all, the human capacity to rebuild, to get back to life and to not give up the possibility of recovery even after terrible losses, has proven itself as a steady force throughout the history of war crimes.

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