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External Landscapes/ Internal Worlds: The Politics of Hate and Anxiety

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ABSTRACT

In this paper the hypothesis is explored that external political and social landscapes shape internal object-relations. These are especially intensified by anxiety and hate in an iterative dynamic. Drawing from ideas from object relations, contemporary

psychoanalysis and group relations, notable shifts towards tyrannical, hate-filled, paranoid-schizoid positions around the world—the USA, Australia, Britain, France, Germany and the Philippines—for example, are considered. The effects on individual and group dynamics are described. It is proposed that psychoanalytic thinkers should contribute to comprehending the world beyond the consulting room.

‘If only there were evil people somewhere insidiously committing evil deeds and it were necessary only to separate them from the rest of us and destroy them. But the line dividing good and evil cuts through the heart of every human being and who is willing to destroy a piece of his own heart?’

Alexandr Solzhenitsyn. *The Gulag Archipelago 1918–1956* (Solzhenitsyn, 1974, p. 168)

In the late nineteen thirties, Charlotte Beradt—a German journalist—smuggled out of Nazi Germany a book containing (in code) the dreams of German citizens. In the 1960’s an English translation of her book, focusing on the political content of the dreams, was published under the title: *The Third Reich of Dreams: The Nightmares of a Nation, 1933–39* by Charlotte Beradt. (Aquarian Press, 1985)

One reviewer (Carter, 2008) wrote of her book: “These dreams show with haunting resonance-how people are remade from the inside—out by totalitarian regimes ...” The unearthing of this book by the late Gordon Lawrence led to his (re) discovery of the phenomenon of social dreaming, a conception of dreams that goes back probably thousands of years in indigenous cultures.

A recent social dreaming event in the USA facilitated by George Bermudez which focused on issues in the LGBTIQ community, produced the following material, which I draw on only to illustrate a current manifestation of this phenomenon. In Bermudez’s (2017) description:

... the first dream was about Trump, and ... there followed dreams with numerous permutations of relational attitudes towards fathers: longing for the father; the rejecting father; shame concerning the father’s judgment; re-finding an absent father; repairing the father relationship; restoration of trust in father’s judgment; hypocrisy of religious fathers;

and

“Another theme was the persecutory terror experienced in the current socio-political context, expressed with many images of war; being trapped in small, constraining spaces; being chased, etc.”(Bermudez, Personal communication, 2017)

Social dreaming is relevant in this context through its recognition that the *dynamics* of the external world or landscape affect, shape, populate and influence the internal objects of our unconscious lives: our internal worlds and our dream lives. Not only *whether* but also *how* the relationship develops between the external socio-political landscape and our internal psychic worlds is the subject of this paper.

Psychoanalysis, from its inception drew our attention to the early dynamic relation between the external and internal worlds and the dynamic objects and part-objects that inhabit them, shape them and are shaped by them, but this has primarily been in regard to early and emergent *parent-infant* object-relations. It concentrated too—but with less emphasis—on the way in which the infant’s phantasies engaged with and affected the external world via projective identification.

The concentration of psychoanalysis on primitive infantile mental states has been quite narrow; on the internal primitive mental states of the *individual*. Primitive alludes to those unmediated states emanating from infancy. Of course psychoanalysis is a two-person psychology and in that regard the *developmental* focus has been on the parent/infant dyad. The *therapeutic* focus was for many years focused more on the ‘internal life’ of the therapeutic dyad and often predominantly on the patient, rather than on the connections between the unconscious life of this dyad and each of its members and rarely on the real global external landscape.

Contemporary developments in psychoanalysis have drawn attention to the dyad itself as a dynamic *unit* and this has been especially explored and developed in a variety of ways in contemporary psychoanalytic frameworks such as relational psychoanalysis. Bion’s hypothesizing of the container/contained dynamic; William and Madeleine Baranger’s conception of ‘confluence’ and Ferro and Basile’s work on the ‘analytic field’ are some of these contemporary psychoanalytic frameworks. They draw attention to the phenomenon that both members of the dyad live in the real world and bring their own set of systemic dynamics to the encounter. Of less attention in our field has been the impact and influence of the *social* conscious and unconscious on the individual mind. Socioanalysis or system psychodynamics as it is also called, is concerned with these influences but primarily explores them at a *group* level.

I conceptualize this broad therapeutic field in which we might consider the influence of the external global landscape on the individual mind, as ‘systemic psychoanalysis’—one which recognizes and explores the dyadic (unconscious) therapeutic relationship as a sub-system that is an element of the larger (unconscious) system of the external landscape. It is one in which we might explore the reciprocal dynamic impact of the external landscape on the dyad and on the internal worlds of the participants. In the individual, this is an evolving internal

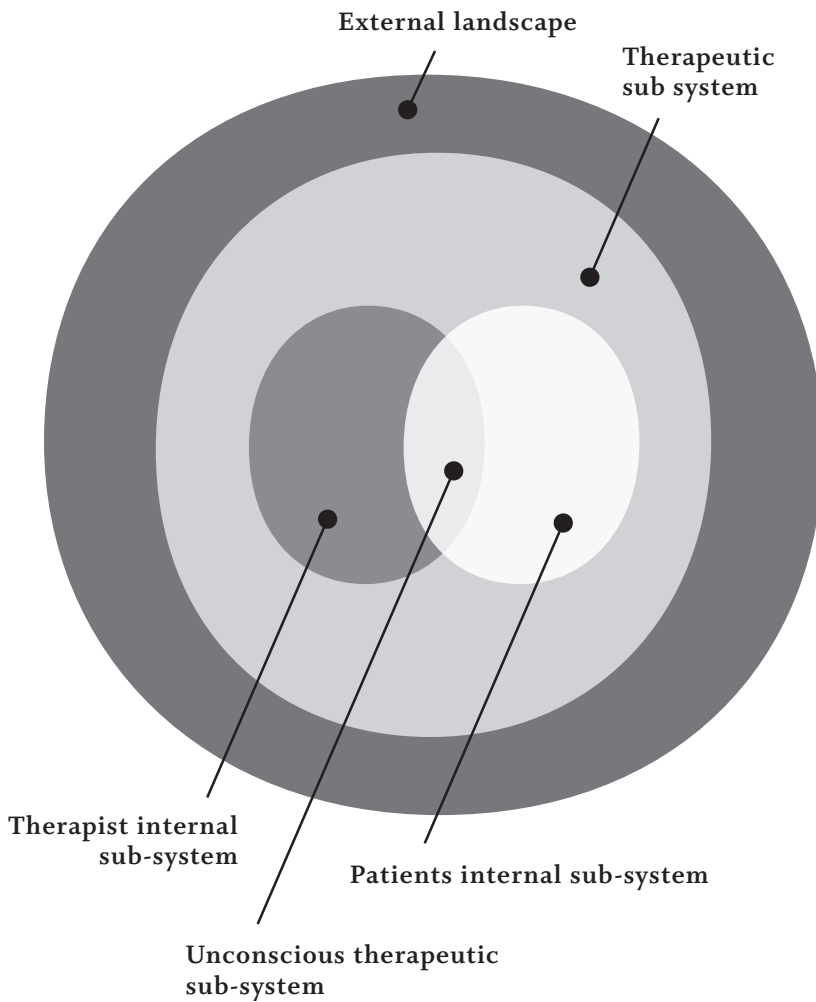


FIG 1. THE THERAPEUTIC RELATIONSHIP AS A SUB-SYSTEM

world which began its formation in infancy and has been formed—and continues to be forming and evolving—over time. (See figure 1)

I think it is relevant to consider the possible isomorphic replication of external dynamics (Axelbank, 2016) not only in the patient or therapist’s internal world but also in the internal dynamic of the therapeutic dyad: mass projective identification where the ‘organization’ of the external world is replicated or mirrored in microcosmic parallel contexts.

There are thus two interwoven strands or questions in this paper. Taking up the comment of the reviewer of Beradt’s book: “how people are remade from the inside out by totalitarian regimes ...”—the primary question is: what is the dynamic relation between the external landscape and the internal world of the person in a totalitarian external landscape?

The secondary question, which follows from this, concerns the reciprocal impact of hatred and anxiety on the internal world and the external landscape when totalitarian regimes predominate. Haidt's research (Haidt, New York, 2012) suggests that totalitarian regimes are more characterized by hatred than by love. I will consider in this context the rise and more importantly the unleashing of primitive states of anxiety and hatred in the external landscape and the individual and the collective implications, and particularly aggressive primitive states.

In addressing this I also believe that it is critical to appreciate some of the dynamics of social groups themselves since they are inevitably the context in which we all live. I will begin at that location.

Over the last few years my personal psychodynamic interest has been shaped by the notion of *engagement*. I have written elsewhere about how the position of the psychoanalytic psychotherapist is one of being both at the centre and the periphery of the therapeutic relationship in a form of emotional engagement, which I distinguish from emotional *involvement*. Emotional engagement facilitates an appreciation of the real sense of the dynamic currents between the two people in the room. I emphasize the distinction: I see emotional *involvement* as a reactive form of emotional participation.

But I think the term *engagement* can and should be expanded as a central issue in our relation to the external world too. In exploring this idea, I returned to an important book by Paul Hoggett, *Partisans in an Uncertain World: The Psychoanalysis of Engagement* (Hoggett, 1992).

In his opening chapter, which is subtitled 'The Political is Personal', Hoggett makes some critical points:

To the extent that its objective is to enable us to lie to ourselves a little less than we do, psychoanalysis can sometimes seem like a merciless process of stripping away illusion ... Alongside its critical method *it has developed its own distinctive blindness, its very own framework of myth and illusion*. Psychoanalysis, to its adherents, offers both disturbance and consolation, and nowhere is this clearer when it seeks to comprehend the world beyond the consulting room. (Hoggett, 1992, p. 3)

And Hoggett continues:

The outside world has otherwise seemed just too incomprehensible Instead, to a world which seems primitive, dangerous and out of control, psychoanalysis has offered the consolation of a good enough personal redemption, a kind of stoical individualism immortalized through Freud's therapeutic aim of 'normal un-happiness'. (Hoggett, 1992, p. 3).

Twenty-five years ago Hoggett wrote of a “world which seems primitive, dangerous and out of control” (Hoggett, 1992, p. 3). These words carry powerful resonance in the world of 2017. And to this I would like to add some comments from Michael Rustin. While he acknowledges Winnicott’s vital focus on the *life force* he adds:

... it is to Bion that we must look for the corresponding analysis of the death wish: an urge at work within individuals and groups alike, *not to know, not to think, not to develop*; a kind of internally activated self-destruct mechanism lurking within the human subject ... *an attack on thinking itself and an attempt to live in a world of anti-thought*. (My emphasis) (Rustin, 1991, pp. 4–5).

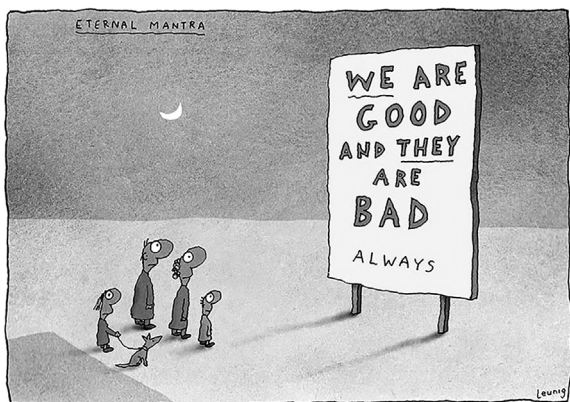
A final quote from Hoggett which goes to the heart of this paper: Modern social movements, particularly feminism, have sought to encompass the relationship between subjectivity and the social world through the phrase ‘the personal is political’. But to my mind, if political and social thought is to come to terms in an adequate way with the contribution of psychoanalysis it needs to have the courage to go further than this ... The personal is, to some extent, political; but the political is also to some extent, personal’. (Hoggett, 1992, p. 5)

This, I believe is the realm of emotional engagement for psychoanalysis.

The current political climate and the associated group dynamics of splitting and lies.

When I first proposed this paper in the second half of 2016, there was already significant evidence of new powerful currents that were shaping the external landscape. Brexit had happened and many, including myself were shocked. The rise of anti-refugee and particularly anti-Islam sentiment (in reaction to DAESH) in the West; the mass migrations which were occurring, and the rise of populist nationalism in Europe, then the USA—and indeed in Australia—was intensifying;

Michael Leunig, the Australian cartoonist, captured the social climate poignantly:



The war in Syria had reached nightmarish proportions; the rise of nationalism in France, Hungary and other countries was unmistakable; the Philippines had elected a tyrannical, murderous leader. And Trump was not yet elected. Since his inauguration, major and disturbing social forces of racism, sexism, homophobia, misogyny and micro and macro-acts of violence have emerged, or rather been unleashed. I stress the word 'unleashed' because I think that these primitive aggressive forces are usually relatively dormant in all of us. Fakhry Davids (2003), whose ideas I will refer to later, describes these dormant dynamics in his work on internalized racism.

Evidence of the unleashing of primitive aggression in the current zeitgeist increasingly appeared in the world media. Andy Campbell, in The Huffington Post wrote:

It was a big week for hate. It was no different than last week.

Acts of violence and intimidation against minority groups are becoming so commonplace that they're tough to track—though we've been trying. This week, reports on three incidents highlighted how fear and hatred have permeated the everyday lives of Americans

On Thursday, a man was charged with aggravated harassment after allegedly kicking a Muslim Delta employee at John F. Kennedy International Airport and promising that Trump would kick the victim out of the country.

"Are you fucking sleeping? Are you praying? What are you doing?" the suspect, 57-year-old Robin Rhodes said to the victim, according to a complaint that KTLA obtained.

"You did nothing but I am going to kick your fucking ass," Rhodes said. "Fucking Islam, fucking ISIS, Trump is here now. He will get rid of all of you. You can ask Germany, Belgium and France about these kinds of people. You will see what happens."

There are now so many instances of hateful acts carried out in Trump's name or policy that saying hateful people are "emboldened" by this administration borders on cliché. (Campbell, A. 2017).

The Conversation website reported on 29th May 2017 in an article entitled 'When the terrorists are white':

The number of violent attacks on U.S. soil inspired by far-right ideology has spiked since the beginning of this century, rising from a yearly average of 70 attacks in the 1990s to a yearly average of more than 300 since 2001. These incidents have grown even more common since President Donald Trump's election. The Southern Poverty Law Center, a nonprofit that researches U.S. extremism, reported 900 bias-related incidents against minorities in the first 10 days after Trump's election—compared to several dozen in a normal week—and the group found that many of the harassers invoked the then-president-elect's name. (The Conversation, August 15, 2017).

Dianne Gartland, an American colleague, sent this message to the listserv of the International Society for the Psychoanalytic Study of Organizations (ISPSO) on 4th December 2016:

My country is dealing with malignant narcissism ... and all the *perversion* that goes along with it (truth is lie and lie is truth; real is not real and not real is real). ... We are seeing, ... almost *no compassion* shown except as it may accrue to his own glory. ... We are facing threats of having our social securities and our health care effectively destroyed, ... our educational foundations shredded and our time-honored direction of growing respect for other people ... fall to pieces.

The publicized bullying in the schools as a *reflection of this leader* is minimal compared to what I have been viewing locally. The verbal attacks on brown peoples whether they are from the Middle East or Mexico and the threats of deportation

... and determination to hire people with a record of hate speech and threats is terrorizing.

... the symptoms and signs shown by our patients are significant and have meaning ... *their unconscious knows something perhaps that others are not completely tuned in to?* ... (Gartland, D. 2016)

Gartland draws attention to the group or social dynamics as well as the individual impact on her patients. After a consideration of the social dynamic I will

explore not only the sad fact that widespread anxiety has been raised in people—patients included of course—but also the impact on our internal worlds.

MacWilliams, writing about the rise of authoritarianism in the USA notes: It is the most recent expression of a long-standing theme in American political life, the tendency and temptation to an ascriptive politics—a political view that ascribes to any relatively disempowered group (whether defined by race, ethnicity, gender, sexual orientation, religious belief, or other identifying category) a certain set of qualities that justify discriminatory treatment. (MacWilliams, 2016, p. 53)

In exploring the *social dynamic* I will reflect first on the unleashing of the primitive: *especially primitive hatred and aggression*. But I first want to note the conception of “Trump” as a social object.

In a previous paper (Shafer, 2007) I argued that prejudice is intrinsic to human nature—for the individual as well as for groups—and that we have to work hard *against* our capacity for hatred and *against* prejudice, one of its tributaries, or confront it. From early infancy we begin—largely outside of conscious awareness—to build up an internal picture of the external world and of the primary relationships we have in and with it and between its objects. Fakhry Davids (2009) makes a similar point. This picture is shaped by a number of key influences, internal and external. We do not simply absorb these external relationships in an objective or photographic way. We are also each endowed with our own peculiar genetic and relational lens through which our experiences are shaped and distorted. External experiences in turn affect the lens itself, so that as we develop, the nature of our experience of the world of relationships alters, and our responses in turn alter the external relationships in an iterative or cyclic process. Through this evolving lens even past memories and experiences can be re-framed and our relation to external objects distorted or altered.

In its simplest form, the mind functions to take in and to keep good experiences and to *get rid of bad* ones. This is a mechanism with which we are born. We know that this quite simple arrangement is critical for human development and is also the basis for some of the most powerful psychological and social processes.

This apparently clear-cut polarization is the most basic instrument to manage our experience: for example, we create in our minds the illusion that good is quite separate from bad; black from white; love from hate; me from you. In fact such creations are illusions or phantasies, which help us to manage complex and contradictory feelings and ideas.

When we are functioning in this more rudimentary or polarized way we are likely to renounce the aspects of ourselves that we dislike or feel uncomfortable

with or which cause us psychic pain. Instead—and this usually occurs outside of our awareness—we experience, perceive and come to believe that these unacceptable elements are ‘out there’ because it feels as if we have gotten rid of them. So, we develop an ‘idea’ about what others are like. Usually we find a suitable person or group who seems to confirm that this badness is ‘out there’, ‘not me’.

As Solzhenitsyn states:

If only there were evil people somewhere insidiously committing evil deeds and it were necessary only to separate them from the rest of us and destroy them. But the line dividing good and evil cuts through the heart of every human being and who is willing to destroy a piece of his own heart?” (Solzhenitsyn, 2007)

I want to strongly emphasize this point. It is often easier to blame others or to find them wanting or flawed, *especially if there is something about them that appears to confirm this*. It is this phenomenon—individually and socially, that tyrants very easily exploit. The basis for these mechanisms is that they save the individual psychic pain and anxiety, and that makes these mechanisms so seductive to use.

Just as the individual tries to disavow or get rid of bad experiences and parts of themselves and identify with or hold onto good ones, so do groups of people. However, the power of groups increases this propensity exponentially. One factor is that the combination of size and distance allows us to imagine that whole categories of people—blacks, Muslims, the disabled, Americans, Jews—or whole institutions—the church, the unions are made up of undifferentiated individuals. So, the more distant and anonymous a group is (and the more extremely it is kept at a distance) the more likely we are not to see that there are countless individual differences and complexities.

Homogenization—seeing all members of a group as the same—is facilitated by the way we classify people and by the words we use to classify them. This process of homogenization is sometimes called ‘fusion’ (Turquet, 1994), because we relate to the members of a group as if they are merged into one idea. The power of language is immense in this process. Fusion words are used to create broad categories. Broad undifferentiated categories of people are more accessible recipients of projective identification.

There are other dynamic phenomena that contribute to consider today, but for the purposes of this paper, these provide a sense of the mechanisms involved and which seem to be readily accessed by tyrants who then mobilize anxiety and hatred in what might be thought of as totalitarian states of mind (Lawrence, 1997). Vamik Volkan (2013) writes about large groups, societies who choose their

traumas in times of insecurity and unite in this while becoming persecutory against those who are “elected” as perpetrators of those traumas.

Gosling captures the essence of this when he describes:

a world of shared creations of the mind, fantasies, attitudes, values, assumptions, and misgivings, that have little that is conclusive to show for themselves objectively, *but by virtue of ‘being held in common’ have a great influence on the life of the group members and are in that sense real* [my emphasis] (Gosling, 1979, p. 81).

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When a group produces highly emotionally charged, shared assumptions, they are difficult to reverse or question: they are unchecked and un-checkable pre-judgments, or are objectively un-validated. When a group has a huge investment in such ideas, the group itself is actually impoverished because it gives rise to defective reality testing. The failure to recognise the other for what they actually are leads to relations that are unreal and intensely self-absorbed to the point of insanity.

It is these phenomena—primitive states of aggression made perverse—that are anti-thinking, as Bion observed and that exploit primal anxieties and hate. Axelbank (2016, p. 28) notes that ‘the toxic dynamics roiling the planet were invading many organizations and groups’. He describes the process of isomorphism, which can be understood as a kind of mass projective identification where the ‘organization’ of the external world is mirrored in microcosmic parallel contexts such as the organization of the internal world.

The external world—conspicuously evident in the current climate in America for example—may be seen to be characterized by phenomena of “alternative facts”, alternative realities, lies that are presented as truths and truths presented as lies; of hatred, racism, misogyny homophobia, bullying and lack of empathy. The widespread dissemination of false news and “alternative facts” and the consequent doubting of truth externally is mirrored in the internal experience of false beliefs about oneself and about the world that can be so pervasive that the “realness” or truth of one’s internal emotional experience is perverted or inaccessible. Bion calls these ‘lies’. I think this is one of the most profound impacts of the current external political and social landscape on the internal world. What is uncontained as a result, is primitive aggression.

Not long after the tsunami of unreality that followed Trump’s inauguration in Washington DC, in Melbourne a man ran amok, driving his car at high speed in a major CBD thoroughfare, in an act of primitive violence, murder and madness. I wondered whether such an unusual act of public violence was an example of the public or social unleashing of primal aggression: the un-containment

of primitive hatred and madness. At the time of writing, the jury is still out as to whether the subsequent analogous violent incident at Westminster, London might be a similarly motivated incident. Recently, in Melbourne, a 72-year-old white Australian man stabbed a Catholic priest in the neck during a Sunday morning service, because of the priest's Indian heritage.

Internal Worlds

The most intimate access psychotherapists have to the internal world of others is in the clinical setting.

The following clinical illustration—disguised to prevent identification—illustrates the shaping of the patient's internal events by the contemporary external landscape.

Recently, in the context of this external global state, a patient struggled even more intensely than usual, with getting in touch with the emotional reality of some of her actions. She is a 32 year old social media consultant who works from home and has two children aged 5 and 3. She described her compulsive daily on-line shopping that was not only bleeding her family's resources dry, but was also leading her to severely neglect her young children. She had originally sought therapy for profound anxiety which had surfaced after the birth of her second child. She frequently remonstrated bitterly with herself over these failings while simultaneously reframing them positively to herself. For example, she would argue that she could always on-sell the products she bought—and maybe even make a small profit. She never did.

About a year ago she had significantly begun to engage more emotionally with these actions in a way that was in touch with the real effect on herself, on her children and on her husband. She also understood its anxiolytic function better. This type of real emotional engagement typifies functioning that is more in the depressive position—authentic recognition and reparation of damage; and the capacity for love and for managing and containing complex feelings. This accompanied a diminution in this problematic and destructive compulsion.

However, in the past six months (at the time of writing) there had been a relapse with an accompanying despotic disconnection from the real consequence of her actions and a disengagement from guilt about this. In her conscious material she frequently referenced her rage with both the new American President as well as the 'spine-less' (her words) inaction and perceived pandering to the right-wing of the Australian Prime Minister, a man who she had hoped would bring the return of some sense of decency to the country. The internal parallels

between the external rise of tyrannical, persecutory states and the failure of a more compassionate object in response, was inescapable, I thought.

Behaviourally, she demonstrated the very dynamic which is occurring unconsciously: the failure of her benevolent self to engage with the tyrannical and somewhat deluded aspect of her mind. This aspect may at times have been psychotic and perverse. She expressed her protest about the failure of the benevolent agent or object (spinelessness) to deal with the tyranny of her compulsion. She conveyed her anguish, feelings of helplessness and her rage at the tyrannical oppressor. In so doing there was a glimmer of awareness of the failure of her own compassionate capacity and the struggle in which she is caught up.

Grueneisen (2017) suggests that in addition to what I am saying that it is perhaps also, in the transference, I who am the Australian Prime Minister; the one who does not provide the containment she feels she needs to dare confront her own aggression.

But what is of particular note here is that the regression to this failing and perverse dynamic seems to have been *stirred up by the ascendancy of Trump* (in particular, with his ‘alternative facts’ like her own alternative and distorted and contradictory interpretations of her behaviours) and the perceived *weakness* of a benevolent Australian Prime Minister.

The real-world narrative in a session as the subject matter of any patient’s material is simultaneously an expression of the unconscious. Ferro suggests that the unconscious has no language of its own but uses the language of consciousness. (Ferro, as cited in Najeeb, 2008). But in the case of my patient it was not only that her narrative about the external world reflected her inner world, but also that the external landscape stimulated a resurgence of the perverse internal organizational functioning. This organization of internal experience has persisted.

This case vignette is not intended as evidence for the influence of the external landscape on the individual internal world in general but as an illustration and aid to understanding one patient with *a valency for this kind of dynamic* who was highly susceptible to its influence. There is a potential in all of us for various sorts of valency.

Levine “offers a framework for understanding how social processes and institutions establish themselves as part of the individual’s inner world and how imperatives of the inner world influence the shape of those processes and institutions”. (Levine, 2017, p. 1)

In so doing, Levine highlights the two-way dynamic which underpins my thinking. This is the case I would most strongly want to make here.

External processes (like public prejudice) shape individual internal dynamics. Then, when there is a collective public release of hatred and anxiety by those

individuals gathered in large actual or virtual groups, the expression of those feelings mushrooms. Public groups thus become further and exponentially invested with these primitive aggressive feelings. Hence what appears to be the recent significantly increased and/or permissible *collective public expression of prejudice*: racism, Islamophobia, anti-Semitism, homophobia, misogyny of which Trump's rallies offer a prime example.

Levine (2017) provides an eloquent explanation from two patients of the dynamic parallels between the external landscape and the internal world, which is worth quoting, though I will not give the detailed case material here:

Both ... were drawn to narratives of a world marked by destructive forces. They held a widely shared view that we live in a world of chaos, destruction, and disorienting change. Each made frequent references to either popular fantasies of a destroyed world, notably cinematic and literary accounts of the post-apocalyptic dystopia, or real world accounts of war, genocide, and racial or ethnic violence. Without rejecting the element of truth in these narratives, it is also important to see the preoccupation with public fantasies of a destroyed world and factual accounts of those forced to live in the reality of such a world (refugees from war zones, victims of atrocities) as suggestive of important qualities of the inner world. (Levine, 2017, p. 25)

Global shifts towards tyrannical, hate-filled, paranoid-schizoid positions

Political swings between the binary political left and right are historically well known and they are also worth examining psychoanalytically—but that is beyond the immediate scope of this paper. It is clearly evident that there have been widespread political swings towards right-wing and particularly extreme right-wing ideologies and regimes: in Europe, in the United States, in Russia and in Australia, in North Korea and in the Philippines, to name some. Hetherington & Weiler (2009) in their book *Authoritarianism & Polarization in American Politics* detail this in American politics, for example.

Whatever the drivers might be—and they are undoubtedly a complex mix of political, social, economic, religious, ideological factors—what might they reveal about the global collective psyche we might wonder? It might be notable too that left-wing thinking is generally and broadly associated with greater social conscience and compassion, while right-wing thinking is generally and broadly associated with individuality and lower empathy (Haidt, 2012).

In psychoanalytic terms, we might loosely associate these with paranoid-schizoid states (becoming increasingly perverse ones) and depressive position states. I would like to briefly allude to an example, to offer a sketch of the external landscape.

Unsurprisingly perhaps, the most dramatic illustration of this external state of affairs is the current situation in the USA. The ascendancy of Donald Trump and what he symbolizes (particularly what he symbolizes) is central. Western suggests that we need to look

at Trump as a social object which so many people have coalesced around and to ask what specific psycho-social and political dynamics produced this ‘Trump object’ that so many people identified with, to enable him to win the Presidency. (Western, 2017, p. 1)

A social object is something to which people attach shared meaning. What shared meaning has been attached to Trump? I am sure that there are many views on this but I would suggest that the following be considered primary in this context: hatred of the “other”. While Trump’s focus has undoubtedly been on Islam as the most identified and dangerous other, there are numerous categories of people which have been swept into this current: Mexicans, people of colour, gay people, Jews, women, Democrats. My earlier example of the rise of hatred exemplifies this.

Dostoevsky captures the spirit of this notion of social object in his 1864 work “Notes from Underground” (Dostoevsky as cited by Bradatan, 2017):

I, for example, says the nameless narrator would not be the least bit surprised if suddenly, out of the blue, amid the universal future reasonableness, some gentleman of ignoble or, better, of retrograde and jeering physiognomy, should emerge, set his arms akimbo, and say to us all: ‘Well, gentlemen, why don’t we reduce all this reasonableness to dust with one good kick, for the sole purpose of sending all these logarithms to the devil and living once more according to our own stupid will!’ That would still be nothing, but what is offensive is that he’d be sure to find followers: that’s how man is arranged.

Bradatan makes the key point, following this vivid and portentous symbol, that:

When the hyper-rationalist model [current in Western efforts to explain political processes] fails, it fails spectacularly. In the American election, reason gave way to fear, resentment, hate and spite. For the most part, “rational agency” was nowhere to be found. What seemed to drive the

support for Trump was darker and more complicated — the heart. (Bradatan, 2017, p. 2)

Trump, as a person ‘of ignoble, or better, of retrograde and jeering physiognomy’ is a dramatically drawn social object—a ‘reality television’ persona, wealthy, boorish, a caricature of pseudo-anti-establishment establishment. He is thus a well-designed receptacle or social object available for massive projective identification by virtue at minimum of the way he has located himself in social space and the pervasiveness of his rhetoric.

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Effect of external political currents on group and social dynamics

In examining some of the effects on group and social dynamics I will focus closer to home. In 2013, I initiated a project on the dynamics of seeking asylum for Group Relations Australia, an organization which is founded on psychoanalytic or socioanalytic thinking,

I first proposed the “Seeking Asylum Project” to the members of Group Relations Australia (GRA), in the context of disturbing policies about refugees and asylum seekers arriving by boat, that the then—and previous—Australian governments had implemented. I was mindful of the fact that GRA has as the second of its organisational aims: *‘to play a socially responsible role, taking up, wherever appropriate and within scope of the organisation’s purpose, current issues in society’*. (In other words a form of psycho-social engagement). The current dynamics of ‘seeking asylum’ characterised by splitting and projective identification, demanded, I felt, such attention. It seemed an important way that that organization could contribute to the good of Australian and other societies from our field—framed by psychoanalysis, group relations, socioanalysis, and system psychodynamics thinking.

Among other roles I played in this project, guest editing a special issue on “Seeking Asylum” of GRA’s international journal *Socioanalysis* gave me some informative insights into the social dynamics surrounding prejudice, hatred and anxiety. Perhaps the most striking theme which I identified was the idea of walking in another’s shoes which underpins the experience of compassion—a depressive position function.

The Australian governments’ policies have, consistently and intentionally, both vilified asylum seekers as ‘illegals’ and banished them out of sight and out of mind off-shore, in this way significantly minimizing the capacities of ordinary

Australians to feel compassion. There has been a process of re-defining asylum seekers through the use of fusion words, into an amorphous and supposedly frightening conglomerate. This vividly illustrates the social processes of splitting and projective identification.

This mobilization and use of splitting for political purposes with its accompanying process of projective identification has become widespread: the vilification of Muslims, the re-emergence of anti-Semitism, increased homophobia, to name a few of the pervasive examples of aggressive 'othering'.

What this dynamic highlights is the paranoid-schizoid organizational landscape that has increasingly conquered our societies and has been exploited by tyrannical leaders. But it is more than only a paranoid-schizoid dynamic: the elements of perverse organization are of major concern.

Michael Rustin suggests that we need to appreciate "the broader states of mind of publics and governments, and the disturbances to rational thought which occur in situations of tension." He describes how post-9/11 political forces have shaped a paranoid state of mind and under these conditions "of heightened fear and hatred, atrocities become 'black holes' around which a negative psychic organization can cohere, both in individuals and collectivities" (Rustin, 2004, p. 7)

This, he asserts, makes balanced thinking very difficult, and evokes splits in which, as we have heard, the enemy is evil and we are virtuous and recognizing any similarities between 'us' and 'them' is made unacceptable.

This has been further exacerbated by the rapid growth of instant mass communication via social media, shaping what Rustin calls a 'global group psychology'. This has created conditions and states of mind that are as dangerous as terrorism itself. It makes accessible rapid, (often anonymous) mass dissemination of propaganda which leaves the recipients in states of mind in which they are unable to discern truth from lies, reality from fantasy.

Finally, I quote from Hannah Segal, one of the most politically vocal psychoanalysts who stated that:

A paranoid-schizoid mentality, which constructs a threatening and powerful enemy as the focal point of psychic organization, seems in fact to be an endemic tendency in American political life ... However, the enemy around which this structure of antagonism coheres is liable to change. This state of mind seems to be something like the condition of 'nameless dread' described by Bion. It is not strong in its grasp of reality (Segal as cited in Rustin, 2004, p. 18).

What effect do these external social dynamics have on our internal worlds? (and vice versa)

To explore the effect on the individual internal world—and to consider some clinical considerations—I want to reference the work of psychoanalyst Fakhry Davids. Davids, in a psychoanalytic exploration of the nature of ‘internal racism’ suggests that “the mechanisms of internal racism . . . are part of the *normal* mind, rather than . . . unique psychopathology, and (I) link *internal racism with specific racist phenomena as they occur in the world and in the consulting room*” (Davids, 2003, p. 2). Davids describes the development of a normal ‘pathological organisation’ of the mind, based on Steiner’s (1993) work, as a way of making sense of how people engage racially, as a form of psychic retreat.

Davids suggests that when an internal racist organisation is established (in all of us) it is *available for defensive use* against painful primitive aspects of the mind. *It can thus be mobilised under the right conditions.*

When I speak of a racist organisation in the patient’s mind it is to draw attention to the fact that once the processes I have just described (projective identification across a perceived difference) are in place, further work was done to construct an inner template that *was to govern relations between us.* (Davids, 2003, p. 5) [emphasis added].

I want primarily to draw attention here to David’s insightful appreciation of the dynamic function of, and changes to, the internal organisation of the mind that normal racism inculcates.

Drawing from Davids’ proposition I think it is feasible to recognise that when the external landscape is characterised by perverse and pathological paranoid-schizoid psychological organisation, this is particularly easily introjected and assimilated when the already established normal racist organisation can be mobilized. Davids continues:

It operates by setting up an internal racist organisation, which is deployed in three discernible steps, usually with lightning speed. First a real difference between subject and object is selected. Next, the subject, by means of projective identification, lodges an intolerable and unwanted part of itself in the object. *Lastly, the internal racist sets about organising a set of relationships between self, object and relevant others, secondary to the original projection.* (Davids, 2003, p. 12) [emphasis added].

‘It is the sheer normality of this organisation of defences that affords internal racism its best protection.’ (p. 8)

As in Steiner’s pathological organisation, the ego can be triggered to retreat to a racist organisation when threatened, as a last refuge ‘to stop the unthinkable from happening’. This, and its *socialised normalcy*, gives it great power.

Like Fakhry Davids, David Levine (2017) describes the relationship between the external landscape and the internal world, but with reference to the work of Bion, Winnicott, Kohut and Fairbairn. While my focus has significantly been on the mechanisms of splitting and projective identification in a paranoid-schizoid and perverse organisation, Levine focuses on ambivalence about the value of the self as a key vulnerability in these dynamics.

Levine also makes the very important point that the private phantasies of the internal world are not merely a reproduction of the external world. There needs to be an organisational valency in the internal world that engages in a complex and multi-layered way with actual events and public fantasy (Levine, p. 26). There is a mutual dependence between the individual internal world and what Levine calls ‘macro-social trends’.

What effect do internal dynamics have on our external worlds?

To consider this dynamic we need to think about the internal world of the individual but more significantly, what happens in the *collective dynamic* of individual internal worlds: the large group of society.

I have earlier described some of the powerful dynamics of large groups and the processes of splitting and projective identification that accompany paranoid-schizoid states especially magnified in totalitarian contexts. I have described the valency in individual minds for being mobilised by these external dynamics. But I want to highlight here the iterative rather than causative potential of these processes.

To illustrate this I am drawing from a recent experience of consulting to a large group, in a group relations experiential conference sponsored by OFEK, Israel. Membership of the group by nationality comprised Israelis, Taiwanese, Chinese, American, British, German, Turkish and Czech participants.

Much has been written about the dynamics of large groups and indeed currently I know of a number of large group learning events where the dynamics of citizenship, leadership and other related constructs are the subject of exploration.

In the recent experience to which I refer, I was one of three consultants to a large group (which was part of the conference exploration of the theme of authority, leadership and partnership in the context of a rapidly changing world and mass migration. I had a rich opportunity to observe the ways in which the *collective internal worlds* of the individual members represented a microcosm of aspects of global dynamics while also seeming to produce group dynamics that demonstrated some of the processes to which I have alluded.

The large study group is structured as a spiral and participants sit anywhere they wish at each session as they study the behaviour of the group itself. Enacted through one Chinese member taking permanent occupation of a seat close to the centre of the spiral, a dynamic theme of ‘occupation’ emerged throughout the event. This occupation was taken up in issues such as the authoritarian occupation of leadership roles; occupation of territory as well as occupation of identity, sexuality and culture. These are dynamics that pervade not only the Israeli context of the conference but also aspects of global social dynamics.

Occupation, the stand-out theme and metaphor of the event had complex and multi-layered meanings. In the context of Israeli-Palestine relations this is a deeply significant issue but it also became apparent through the Asian representation among the membership that it held other powerful global echoes of the relationship between China and Taiwan and also other European and international settings.

This very brief vignette exemplifies the way in which the unconscious personal dynamics of individual members of a large group pervades and shapes the dynamics of the social: the occupant of the central chair was not motivated solely by an act of individual choice.

Conclusion

In her seminal work on hospitals as institutions, Isobel Menzies Lyth (1960) identified that social systems were organised in such a way as to manage the anxieties created by the work they perform: *social defenses* (group versions of individual defences mechanisms) were the vehicle for this. She recognised, however, that while anxieties were galvanized by the nature of the work of an organisation, their origins arose out of “phantasy situations that exist in every individual in the deepest and most primitive levels of the mind”(p. 284). At its root, this is the struggle between good and bad (in the broadest and most complex meanings of the notions). Levine (2017) notes that this is universal, but the comparative strengths of these forces and in particular the form of the struggle and the defenses mobilized varies between individuals as well as groups. With the unleashing of primitive

aggressive states, the most primal form of defence is mobilised: *splitting and projective identification*.

Earlier I alluded to Hoggett's description in the early nineties of a "world which seems primitive, dangerous and out of control". I want to conclude with some remarks not only about the state of the world today vis-a-vis the expression of primitive hatred and the rise of anxiety, but also about what we as psychoanalytic practitioners might contribute at the minimum.

Following the recent violent attacks in Westminster we saw a counter reaction in a mass demonstration of love.

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PHOTO: HUFFINGTON POST UK, MARCH 29TH, 2017

Similar slogans pervaded many of the protest marches following Trump's inauguration.



PHOTO: ALISDARE HICKSON, FLICK CC BY SA-2.0

The idealised wish for love to triumph is undoubtedly a positive reaction to pervasive hatred (and anxiety). But ultimately it is the pursuit of the elusive reconciliation and integration of love and hate—internally and externally—that could triumph.

What I am saying, suggests Grueneisen (2017), implies the necessary confrontation with our own destructive sides, the mourning and reparation that lead to reconciliation and integration of love and hate. She suggests that depressive anxieties (i.e. the fear of having to confront our destructive sides and the doubtfulness about our capacity for reparation) often prevent us from making progress in the direction I indicate.

I hope I have conveyed my understanding of the dynamic inter-relatedness between the external landscape and our internal worlds in the context of the politics of hate and anxiety. I conclude with two quotations and comments. First, one from Dostoevsky (cited by Bradatan, 2017):

It is clear “to the point of obviousness,” he confesses in “A Writer’s Diary,” that “evil lies deeper in human beings than our socialist-physicians suppose; that no social structure will eliminate evil; that the human soul will remain as it has always been; that abnormality and sin arise from that soul itself; and, finally, that the laws of the human soul are still so little known, so obscure to science, so undefined, and so mysterious ... (Bradatan, 2017, p. 1)

And perhaps a little more hopefully, and also taking up my earlier idea of psychoanalytic engagement with the external landscape, Rustin’s comment that the contribution that psychoanalysis might make:

“is to address the states of anxiety ... to show how containing social structures, and spaces for reflection within them, have a bearing on the anxieties felt by individuals, and can mitigate and move these in a more positive direction” (Rustin, 2005, p. 21)

Hoggett’s imperative, that psychoanalysis *must* try to comprehend the world beyond the consulting room is, I believe, crucial.

And the very last word, from Freud himself:

“In the end I succeeded ... but the struggle is not over.”

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