

## Rundbriefe Take II: Response to Letter One:

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As I am writing this letter Israel is mourning the loss of nearly 1300 civilians and at least 2000 Palestinians in Gaza alone have been killed by a nightly bombing campaign, tens of thousands have been displaced to the south as the Israeli army is preparing to invade Gaza, and hundreds of thousands have lost their home. They are running out of food, water and have no electricity. Our country rather than calling for a cease fire is supplying Israel with weapons while the stocks of the top arms manufacturers are soaring. I cannot but respond to Letter One from the perspective of these events. I cannot wrap my mind around how so many analysts seem to justify the killing, displacement and drastic deprivation of so many Palestinians in response to the killings by Hamas, while also claiming to be apolitical. Yes Israel has to act to ensure the safety of its civilians. But is this the way to ensure the safety of its civilians? So many cannot seem to understand the inhumanity of Hamas' actions. I think that really they don't want to understand. If they did, it wouldn't take a deep analysis to understand that a people who were forcefully marched out of their homes at gun point, killed, confined to refugee camps without access to basic human necessities, and repeatedly attacked and killed by the thousands (from the latest New York Times graph of Israeli and Palestinian casualties

<https://www.nytimes.com/interactive/2023/10/07/world/middleeast/israel-gaza-maps.html> since 2008 alone), that children who grow up around killings, explosions, home demolitions, pain and hatred, without any possibility for a better future for them and their families, would grow up to hate their occupiers.

Before I even became an analyst I watched a moving movie by a Palestinian director called "Paradise Now" about two Palestinian teenagers one of whom becomes a suicide bomber. It was not hard to identify with the character. I have heard some Jewish analysts argue: our families went through the holocaust and we didn't become terrorists. How does an analyst, a person who believes in the critical role of development in shaping the personality, compare Jews who grew up in relative comfort in Europe, with access to education, medical care etc before the Holocaust, or even children who went through the Holocaust but then survived and were able to move to relative safety, how can that situation be compared to one in which one's entire life and the lives of their families is mired in danger, humiliation and deprivation for the foreseeable future? What kind of a comparison is that? So the real analytic question in my mind is, how do otherwise empathic caring people, turn a people into an Other who does not deserve basic human rights and compassion?

I can think of several ways, based on things I have been hearing my entire life about Palestinians from Israeli family, friends and colleagues:

1. "Hamas uses Palestinian civilians as a shield, so civilian casualties are unavoidable". This is the "it cannot be helped" excuse, there is nothing to be done, Israel must protect its citizens against Hamas and it cannot be helped that innocent Palestinians are in the way. However if Israel truly was interested in protecting its citizens why would it expand the settlements in the West Bank moving its forces there rather than keeping forces in the south to protect the Gaza border? Why wouldn't it seek peace with its neighbors to create a safer place for all? Why would it take as long as twenty hours to come rescue those being attacked (it doesn't take that long to drive from the northern to the southern tip of the country

and back again) and ignore the alarms that sounded off when Hamas used large bulldozers to take down the barbed wire fences?

2. "The Palestinians exaggerate their injuries and deaths for the cameras in a publicity stunt": The dehumanizing or fake news excuse: Their suffering isn't real, it's all fake, we don't have to pay attention to it because deep down we know it's not real.

3. "Palestinians can go to Egypt or Jordan or other Arab countries". None of the Arab countries want their own people, they want them to remain a thorn in Israel's side: This is the all Muslims are the same excuse. Why don't the Irish move to France instead of staying in occupied Northern Ireland? They are both Christian.

4. "They (Palestinians) are all supporting Hamas and Hezbollah, they hate Jews and want to throw them into the ocean". This is the paranoid-schizoid excuse: "They" hate us so we have to protect ourselves from them, they are all haters and terrorists. Has anyone stopped to ask themselves why those who do so hate Israel? As analysts we are supposed to be experts in trial identifications, so let's try this on for size: you grow up in cramped quarters in very poor and often inhumane conditions and you know that it is the result of a force keeping you there, denying you basic human rights, having killed, displaced from their homes, destroyed their homes and imprisoned hundreds of thousands of your people, and you are supposed to protest and empathize when fighters go into Israel and kill civilians who have all served or will serve in the army and are part of the reserve Israeli force? Hate fuels hate, violence fuels violence. It doesn't take psychoanalysis to understand this one.

My thoughts then turn to the context in which most Israelis and Palestinians encounter each other: as enemies. All Israelis (except certain Ultra-Orthodox Jews, many of whom are also the ones living in illegal settlements and continuously displacing Palestinians from their homes) serve in the Army. After serving for two to three years they can always be called back until a certain age, into the reserve forces. The first contact that most Israelis make with Palestinians in the occupied territories is while entering these territories wearing an army uniform, as part of an army convoy, heavily armed. What they see when they enter the territories in this way is fear and hatred. Boys throwing stones. Every teenager can be a terrorist. This I believe contributes to the feeling of "they hate all of us". How would their experience be different if they entered the occupied territories as civilians? Israeli members of Combatants for Peace have in fact done that, ex-soldiers who refused to serve after meeting with Palestinians in circumstances that heightened a sense of commonality: as two fathers, as two people mourning, as two women with children. This commonality led to the incredible realization that the enemy is human.

The critical emails I have received in response to my postings on the APsaA listserv often repeat "what do politics have to do with psychoanalysis?" How can they not see that politics are already in psychoanalysis? In which people get to speak, present and which are silenced. In the way we listen to our patients and interpret intrapsychic conflict and maladaptive anger rather than empowering them to fight oppression, in the ways we encourage a highly individualistic society where the goal is to "work, play and love". Is that really the goal? We all recognize that some of Freud's ideas were limited by the culture and context in which he lived, however the goal of psychoanalysis hasn't changed in over a century. Is it really sustainable for us each to work, play and love in our little bubble, without any thought given to how our work, play and love affect other people, animals and the planet? What is meant by love anyway? Love our husbands and wives and children only? Our friends? What about strangers, what

about our enemies, what about the planet? Are those a part of our love? If so aren't global issues of concern to us all? Especially since the country in which we live plays such a key role in driving this current conflict?

A friend who is a child refugee person of color and trauma therapist heard that psychoanalysts were saying one should not discuss race in the consulting room unless the patient brings it up first and she laughed: "I would never feel safe being the one to bring up race in a therapy office!" Under the guise of neutrality, a concept which has moved away from the even hovering listening stance it originally signified, psychoanalysts now disguise their own origins, their own political beliefs, their own race and ethnicity, while expecting the patient to bare all. And then once the patient has bared all, while knowing nothing of the analyst's stance, the analyst interprets from a raceless, classless, cultureless, apolitical omniscient vantage point the content shared as all resulting from the patient's intrapsychic forces. So the patient has to internalize as their own the analyst's politics and views, all while claiming to leave politics outside the consulting room. Like Laplanche's intromission, the analyst's disavowed biases are carried through their interpretations and implant in the patient's psyche, while denying the patient the psychic freedom to translate and make sense of them on their own.

I often question why I do this, why I post, why I get involved. I have plenty of interests outside of "the social", plenty of work, patients, and obligations to keep myself busy and yet here I am on a Saturday night writing this letter. I recognize that my idealism is quite impractical but somehow for me psychoanalysis has always been about healing, and healing cannot happen alone, healing is a community affair, and I guess I haven't quite found my community. So I am jumping up and down yelling and hoping to find people whose thinking makes sense to me, who see how twisted our reality is, how the truth is obscured, how what really matters in this world is crushed by the cogs of profit, people who seek a connectedness that does not aim to exclude or dehumanize others. Thank you for giving me the chance to express all of this and be a part of this project.