



Mental Health Organisations as Moral Agents: Professional Responsibility in a Settler-Colonial Context

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Introduction

There is a ‘common sense’ view that, of course, the colonialism that characterised the world system prior to the establishment of nation states across Africa and Asia post-1945 is a thing of the past. It is understood that ‘imperialist’ assumptions are incompatible with the much taunted ‘values’ that are understood to inform Western thought and behaviour in the modern era. Yet, while one might say that Africa and Asia ‘decolonised’ over the latter half of the 20th century, the metropolitan countries went through no procedure equivalent to, say, the denazification of Germany. It seems reasonable to suppose that an enduring coloniality contributes to the failure of the major powers to detect anything problematic in the processes of dispossession, ethnic cleansing, impoverishment and repression that only became more blatant under the Trump-Netanyahu axis.

My involvement in Palestine/Israel over a number of years, including exploring contemporary scholarship from a number of disciplines, has clarified for me that the dynamic relationship between the Jewish Israeli and Palestinian collectives has to be understood in terms of an ongoing settler colonial project¹. The invitation to speak at the 2020 ‘Psychoanalysis and the Social Sphere’ conference² arrived just as the *International Journal of Applied Psychoanalytic Studies*’ special edition on Palestine, which I had guest-edited, appeared online³. I commented in the editorial:

what is the point of another special issue on Palestine/Israel, if not to stimulate interventions designed to bring closer a future in which justice and peace can be enjoyed by all? (Kemp 2020a).

The point is not just to understand what’s going wrong, but to contribute to a resolution – not just to interpret the world, but to change it.

While there are many who still claim that thinking in this way contravenes some notion of therapeutic ‘neutrality’, it has become increasingly clear over the dozen years since I first visited Palestine that our profession is deeply if unthinkingly complicit with the crimes committed by the Israeli regime. My contribution here is intended to show both how actively our professional organisations currently intervene on the side of settler

¹ See, for example, contributions to the special issue of *Settler Colonial Studies*, Volume 2, Issue 1 (2012) ‘Past is Present: Settler Colonialism in Palestine’; and the *Journal of Holy Land and Palestine Studies*, Volume 15, Issue 1, May, 2016 ‘Israeli Settler-Colonialism and the Palestinian Naqab Bedouin’, and Volume 17, Issue 1, May, 2018 ‘Special Issue on Settler-Colonialism and Indigenous Rights in Al-Quds/Jerusalem’.

² This paper is an expanded version of the author’s contribution to that conference.

³ <https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/toc/15569187/2020/17/2>

colonialism, (in my opinion thereby betraying their central *raison d'être*, understanding the causes of and providing therapeutic responses to psychological ill-health), and to suggest that there are more progressive and constructive alternatives at hand.

For mental health organisations to act as responsible moral agents, they will need to be aware of the global reality of centre-periphery violence and contemporary colonial dynamics in various locations. This may be especially true (but also particularly difficult to acknowledge) in the case of Palestine/Israel, whose economy, culture and institutional networks are so closely integrated with those of Europe and North America. Yet here, settler colonial processes act as the ongoing driver of state crime, with its intense and sustained manufactured suffering, and the elaboration of apartheid structures 'from the river to the sea' (B'Tselem 2021, Thrall 2021). Similar consequences may flow from racially oppressive state strategies in Tibet, Kashmir, Myanmar and China and, as citizens as well as mental health workers, we might be equally mindful of the human consequences. Only in Palestine/Israel, however, does an entrenched partisanship acting in the interests of the colonial power characterise mainstream discourse. The fact that a convincingly representative section of Palestinian civil society has requested that we take specific actions to indicate our refusal to approve of their oppression also puts this particular example in a category of its own.⁴

Over the centuries many individuals and groups have immigrated to and emigrated from Palestine. Jews and Christians from Europe established educational and religious institutions to add to and enrich an existing multi-faith society. The experience of such benign exchanges of population perhaps explains the welcome hand ordinarily extended to European emigrants by indigenous societies around the globe, often to their later cost. The immigration organised under the auspices of political Zionism, a colonial movement founded in the late 19th Century, was of a different kind, and one that made violent conflict inevitable (Segev 2000). Rather than contributing to the host society, its adherents established agricultural and industrial enterprises that excluded local people. Zionist organisations picketed Jewish enterprises that employed Palestinians. The Jewish National Fund, established in 1901 and still active in supporting the development of illegal settlements⁵, stipulates in its charter that only Jews buy or lease its lands. Other bodies, from trade unions to paramilitary groups and administrative bodies were, likewise, established on a racially exclusive basis, and were intended to form the nuclei of a future Jewish State.

The presence of an indigenous people was from the very start the overriding obstacle to the Zionist movement's primary objective (Karmi 2007, Shavit 2014).

This is settler colonialism. Colonialism, in whatever form, entails behaviour incompatible with the norms and values that the Western world claims as its own. Settler colonialism, the attempt to substitute one people for another, the drive to take the land

⁴ For the specific parameters of the academic and cultural boycott, see the 'PACBI Guidelines for the International Academic Boycott of Israel' at <https://bdsmovement.net/pacbi/academic-boycott-guidelines/> PACBI further discusses the concept of 'normalisation' in 'Israel's Exceptionalism: Normalising the Abnormal', at <https://bdsmovement.net/news/israel%E2%80%99s-exceptionalism-normalizing-abnormal>

⁵ See https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Jewish_National_Fund

while rejecting its indigenous population, presupposes brutal measures, including forms of actual terrorism (see Suarez 2016), unsavoury to its perpetrators, who project the brutality onto its victims – who become, according to the times, ‘barbarians’, ‘savages’ or ‘terrorists’. I think we should regard the failure of academic and political discourse to engage with the Israeli State in these terms as evidence of the persistence of colonial assumptions within Western perceptions of the self and other⁶. To reframe our thinking in terms of our professed humanist ethic requires a thoroughgoing exploration of alternative readings against the available evidence, and in particular through a re-integration of Palestinian experience and perspectives.

It is precisely this which is being prevented by the current assault on free speech that was first focused on the world of party politics and local government, and is now being pursued in the educational sphere (MEE Staff 2021, Sherwood 2021). Underlying the attempt to exclude Zionism from ordinary public disputation is the assertion that Zionism is a facet of Judaism, that ‘Jew’ and ‘Zionist’ be regarded as coterminous (so rendering rejection of Zionism a form of anti-Semitism). An ahistorical and inaccurate stereotype of what it is to be Jewish, (often itself described as anti-Semitic by those who feel *their* reality is erased by it), underpins an extension of the eliminatory anti-Palestinian racism that characterises Israeli society into Western discourse more generally. There are signs that the IHRA ‘new definition’ of anti-Semitism, used to spearhead this campaign, is now coming under belated scrutiny.⁷

Contemporary defenders of the status quo in Palestine/Israel have a two-tier task: to continue to assert the central claim of Zionism that there was no indigenous people with rights to the land present in the territory prior to 1948, and then to deny the racism implicit in the claim. An attempt to meet this challenge relevant to the psychoanalytic world is to be found in a recent article by David Spitz, written as a rejoinder to a ‘Political Minds’ presentation by Fakhry Davids’ (Spitz 2020).

Spitz takes Davids to task on a number of levels, refusing the salience of any analogy between the inter-communal dynamics of Apartheid South Africa and Palestine/Israel, and rejecting too the designation of the Zionist project as a colonial one. There is a lengthy discussion in the main text of the slogan ‘a land without a people for a people without a land’, which Davids had years before mis-attributed to Golda Meir. In a footnote Spitz introduces another of Meir’s statement whose authenticity is undisputed:

‘There was no such thing as Palestinians . . . When was there an independent Palestinian people with a Palestinian State? . . . It was not as though there was a Palestinian people in Palestine considering itself as a Palestinian people and we came and threw them out and took their country away from them. They did not exist.’

⁶ A clear example of such coloniality is provided by the Establishment’s embrace of the IHRA re-definition of anti-Semitism, a document that seeks to police thought about Israel and Zionism, without any consultation with the people it thereby disinherits and demonises.

⁷ Recently there have been important developments, including a critique of the IHRA document by Palestinian scholars, (Abdallah et al 2020), and the publication of the Jerusalem Declaration on Anti-Semitism (Jerusalem Declaration (2021). For a Palestinian view on the Jerusalem Declaration see BDS National Committee (2021).

This would seem to offer prima facie evidence for Davids' suggestion that, at the psychic level, a genocidal idea might underlie Zionism and the consciousness of Jewish Israeli society, but Spitz wants us to draw the opposite conclusion, citing authorities who insist that 'politically speaking' Meir was 'entirely correct', simply describing a socio-political reality (ibid p19).

Spitz asserts that the issue is not whether the land was inhabited, but whether it was inhabited by 'a' people, whose presence would need to be evidenced by the exhibition of 'nationalist or separatist tendencies' (ibid). The basis of his assertion (the absence of a Palestinian consciousness) conflicts with the historical evidence (Khalidi 1997, Qumsiyeh 2011 pp36-89), but the point here is not historical accuracy but ideological outlook. The logic is convoluted, but important to follow: it is that peoples who are not nationalistic, in the European sense, cannot be regarded as custodians of the land on which they live. The slippage is characteristic of the Social Darwinism that long justified European expansionism, that informs the Balfour Declaration and is made explicit in Churchill's infamous 'dog in a manger' analogy.⁸ I read Spitz's piece as an apologia for the very colonising process that he insists does not exist, itself evidencing a consistent ethnocentric bias in favour of the dominant social group.⁹

I argue that the violence that characterises Israeli policy towards the Palestinian population is best understood as an expression of the settler colonial character of the State. An analysis of history and geography textbooks used in Israeli schools leaves the reader in little doubt of the ideologically driven and purposeful inculcation of contempt and fear of Palestinians in successive generations of Jewish Israeli children (Peled-Elhanan 2012).

There is an alternative argument that might be mentioned here as it has gained credibility amongst colleagues who do at least concede that Israeli behaviours require an explanation. In this view, the roots of the ongoing conflict are to be found in the traumatic experiences of the European Jews who immigrated to Palestine following the Nazi genocide. The Holocaust certainly led many to embrace the idea of Israel as a haven for Jews, and the traumatic impact of the genocide has doubtless contributed in myriad ways to the evolution of Jewish Israeli society. Still, I find the suggestion that it has determined the nature of the relationship between it and the Palestinian national community uncomfortable as well as unconvincing, for reasons I have discussed elsewhere (Kemp 2020b).

The survivors of the Holocaust who arrived in Palestine after the Second World War were long regarded as inferior and dubious additions to the Jewish community there: they were not the ones setting the society's martial tone. The family background of the

⁸ Winston Churchill's 1937 statement to the Palestine Royal Commission (known as the Peel Commission): "I do not agree that the dog in a manger has the final right to the manger even though he may have lain there for a very long time... I do not admit for instance, that a great wrong has been done to the Red Indians of America or the black people of Australia. I do not admit that a wrong has been done to these people by the fact that a stronger race, a higher-grade race, a more worldly wise race to put it that way, has come in and taken their place."

⁹ For a critique of other current framings of the situation – as a conflict of nationalisms, for example – see the lecture by Abdel Takriti (2019).

historian of Israeli militarism, Haim Bresheeth-Zabner, suggests a reverse process of incorporation.

Bresheeth-Zabner's parents were Polish Jews who between them had survived incarceration in Auschwitz, Bergen-Belsen and Mauthausen. In the immediate post-war period they lived in a displaced persons camp in Italy. 'Having failed to secure passage elsewhere', Bresheeth-Zabner writes, 'my parents decided to emigrate to Israel in May 1948, not a choice they would have otherwise considered' (Bresheeth-Zabner p1). They were socialists, and the father was a pacifist: 'After what he had experienced, he was not prepared to shed blood, his own or anyone else's' (ibid p2). He was arrested and imprisoned by the new Israeli authorities. Yet, over time, they adjusted to their new environment:

My parents, like so many other Holocaust survivors who came to Palestine/Israel after WWII, were hardly willing colonialists. But living as part of the colonial project, they were normalised into its ranks, and later also accepted its rationale and its methods. (ibid p3)

The brutal use of force to forward a project of ethnic cleansing had already begun, (with dozens of massacres of Palestinian civilians in the course of the Naqba), together with the cover-up that continues to this day (Ofir 2016).

An acknowledgement that we are witness to a settler colonial process, if taken seriously, focuses attention on an issue rigorously avoided in mainstream discourse, namely, what is the Israeli regime's ultimate objective – its actual vision of the future 'Jewish State'? The claims that Israel, past and present, is merely reactive to external aggression, acting in self-defence, cannot withstand an encounter with the historical evidence: the progressive 'de-development' of Gaza, the relentless colonisation of the West Bank, and the excruciating details of a military occupation designed to isolate, dismember, impoverish and degrade. With the native population being described within Knesset committee discussions as a 'virus' that is threatening to 'invade' the Jordan Valley, we see the psychological rationalisation of ethnic cleansing appearing in the form of undisguised anti-Palestinian racism (White 2020).

The outcomes of past attempts to replace an indigenous population with another can be grouped in a limited number of ways: the evacuation of the settler population (as in Algeria); genocide (North America, Australia); and decolonisation (partially achieved in South Africa). The latter, I assume we would agree, is the only outcome compatible with universal humanism and democratic principles.

Settler Colonialism and Racism

Within this settler colonial process, the situation is not 'stuck' and there is no stalemate. There is a military occupation, but the widespread use of the term 'the Occupation' as a blanket term becomes a misnomer when what we actually see is a highly dynamic and aggressive transformation of the land driven by a conscious belief that only one of the two national communities who reside upon it have the right to do so¹⁰. The way that

¹⁰ As is openly proclaimed in the 2018 Basic Law: Israel as the Nation State of the Jewish People. As Netanyahu confirmed, 'Israel is "not a nation-state of all its citizens," but rather "the nation-

coercive power is being employed to ethnically cleanse and ghettoise the country answers to the international legal definition of apartheid¹¹, and may already meet the conditions of a genocide¹².

Settler colonialism has historically given rise to a 'logic of elimination' (Wolfe 2016) that has determined relations between the colonising society and the indigenous people it seeks to displace. In the case of Palestine/Israel, the ruling ideology, Zionism - a clear example of ethnic nationalism - both justifies, and obscures from its adherents, the ethnocentric nature of the national project and the means employed to achieve its central objectives.

The systematic degradation of Gaza as a place fit for human habitation epitomizes this eliminatory racism, while the wider world's failure to engage with this atrocity provides a telling example a racism of indifference described by Chomsky¹³ (cited in Loewenstein 2007). Metropolitan white society seems unable to perceive those located beyond its margins as belonging to the human race; there is no stain on the conscience when those who lose their lives and livelihoods are not considered as fully human.

The psychology behind these phenomena is not the primary concern of this paper¹⁴. From this point, the intention is to take psychotherapeutic organisations themselves as subjects, as (potentially) moral agents, in order to review their relationship to a situation in which the psychotherapy professions are deeply embroiled, and which, in my opinion, should concern anyone with an interest in the socio-political determinants of mental health, individual and collective trauma, and much else besides.

state of the Jewish people.” See <https://www.timesofisrael.com/pm-to-star-who-rapped-anti-arab-rhetoric-israel-not-state-of-all-its-citizens/>

¹¹ Apartheid, a crime under international law, is defined in the UN Convention on the Suppression and Punishment of the Crime of Apartheid' of 1973 as 'inhuman acts committed for the purpose of establishing and maintaining domination by one racial group of persons over any other racial group of persons and systematically oppressing them'.

¹² The definition of Genocide, from Article II of the Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide: 'In the present Convention, genocide means any of the following acts committed with intent to destroy, in whole or in part, a national, ethnical, racial or religious group, as such: a) Killing members of the group; b) Causing serious bodily or mental harm to members of the group; c) Deliberately inflicting on the group conditions of life calculated to bring about its physical destruction in whole or in part; d) Imposing measures intended to prevent births within the group; e) Forcibly transferring children of the group to another group'. For a brief review of the term in relation to Palestine see Centre for Constitutional Rights (2016).

¹³ Cited by Loewenstein (2007): 'Evidently, a crucial case is omitted, which is far more depraved than massacring civilians intentionally. Namely, knowing that you are massacring them but not doing so intentionally because you don't regard them as worthy of concern. That is, you don't even care enough about them to intend to kill them..'. One could also think of this as entirely ego-syntonic racism.

¹⁴ There were two panels at the Conference at which a version of this paper was first presented that explored the psychological dynamics in depth: one on 'indelible racism', and another on 'fascist states of mind'.

The Case for Solidarity

The human rights lawyer, and chronicler of the despoliation of the West Bank, Raja Shehadeh, describes Zionism as ‘an anachronistic colonial project in a postcolonial age’. The Palestinians, he writes, have no expectations of western governments: ‘Instead, they place their hope in the solidarity offered by people sympathetic to their cause’ (Shehadeh 2019).

The question is: Are we among those people? What is the relationship between ‘their cause’ and the ethics underlying psychotherapy and psychoanalysis? Should psychoanalysis be an ‘apartheid free zone’? Is it morally acceptable that professional associations deny the nature of global political structures when engaging with those who are embroiled in its regimes of violence?

Let’s admit there’s a problem. We have a political culture which, as regards the Middle East, is set up to enforce a general stupidity. The nature and purpose of State violence cannot be contemplated; Israel’s end goals are never to be discussed; we must pretend there’s no philosophical gulf between its ruling ideology and the norms of liberal democracy. The fellow travellers are in control; the witch hunts roll on.

We are told that it is those who speak of boycotts and divestment who are aiding terrorism. But what if the exact opposite were the case? Had Judge Goldstone’s report into the 2009 massacre in Gaza resulted in war crimes prosecutions, might not this have deterred the killing sprees of 2012 and 2014 (over 2,000 killed, among them 500 children, during the latter assault), and the murdering and maiming of unarmed protesters at the Great March of Return? It is the appeasement of Israel that exposes civilians to a reign of terror.

Psychoanalysis and socio-political context

Some might say: what does this have to do with psychoanalysis? What follows is based on the view that the mental health community constitutes a significant component of civil society, contributing to the reproduction and evolution of social consciousness and public morality. Given the ethic underlying psychoanalytic work, which I take to be compassionate, truth-seeking, and founded on a universal humanism, one would expect our influence to be principled and constructive. Paradoxically it is complacency here, I suspect, that exacerbates the problem: the profession takes its virtue for granted, ‘knowing’ it to be on the side of openness, pluralism, racial equality, tolerance, and universalist principles. We might have greater self-awareness if we embraced the opposite assumption, which I would suggest is the one borne out by the historical record. That, in the absence of remedial effort, all psychoanalytic institutions internalize the social character and dominant ideologies of their host societies.

This is surely why psychoanalytic culture has to confront its own racism and homophobia. In each of these cases, the profession has not itself pressed towards a more compassionate society. Rather, it has belatedly adapted itself to transformations in public opinion in which it played no active part. Our response to the ongoing Naqba in Palestine/Israel suggests the same automatic reinforcement of hegemonic norms, regardless of whether these are valid, or humane. Mental health institutions within Israel also reflect the normative assumptions that underlie their society, and the supremacist

project upon which it is embarked (Kemp and Khouri 2019). The implications of this are, and ought to be, disturbing.

The collusion of mental health organisations with colonial oppression

I will now briefly present three situations through which to intelligibly question the nature of our profession's social contribution. The first concerns the NSPCC, the UK's leading children's charity, campaigning against all forms of cruelty to children and providing therapeutic services to those affected. JCB is a large British corporation that sells heavy equipment to an Israeli company contracted by the State to demolish Palestinian homes, in violation of international law. This causes profound trauma to the children affected (Shalhoub-Kevorkian 2009, Save The Children/PCC 2009); hundreds of homes are destroyed each year; in fact, tens of thousands of families live with a demolition order hanging over their heads, not knowing when the bulldozers will appear. When they do, families are given 15 minutes to remove some valuables before watching their homes crushed.

JCB's involvement has been documented over many years and it has been included in a United Nations list of companies complicit in constructing illegal settlements (OCHA 2020). Concurrently, JCB has donated over £5 million to the NSPCC¹⁵. It would appear that services to children in Staffordshire and North Wales are financed from profits derived in part from this illegal and immoral practice. The NSPCC is assisting JCB to launder its reputation, and in its publicity the company is pleased to boast about its contribution to tackling child abuse¹⁶.

I cite this case for two reasons. First, it starkly illustrates the West's ego-syntonic racism of indifference, already mentioned. By 'ego-syntonic' is implied a racism that, like the anti-black racism that characterized the heyday of the slave economy, elicits no internal conflict (Kemp 2021). The prejudice cannot be consciously acknowledged as racism, but this does not imply that it has been subject to repression. An unacknowledged and unnoticed double standard renders this unnecessary. The NSPCC, I am sure, harbours no more hatred of the Palestinians than did the British Government when it declared that the centenary of the Balfour Declaration in 2017 was a cause for celebration, not remorse.

Second, it raises a dilemma that can confront any organization, when self-interest and principle pull in different directions. The outcome tells us something about a group's ethical bearing. To bring this closer to our subject, it is one thing for psychotherapeutic associations, inspired by Black Lives Matter, to make new anti-racist resolutions; it is another to publicly confirm that financial reserves will not be invested in companies that underwrite apartheid.

My second example:

Last year a conference on childhood trauma was held in London, co-sponsored by the British Psychoanalytic Society (BPAS), other UK bodies, and the Israeli

¹⁵ See <https://www.nspcc.org.uk/support-us/partner-with-us/our-partners/>

¹⁶ See <https://www.jcb-finance.co.uk/nspcc>

Psychoanalytic Society. The conference programme avoided dealing with the deliberate and systematic traumatization of Palestinian children by the Israeli regime.

Nineteen clinicians, most from the BPAS, signed a letter that appeared in the BPC's *New Associations*, urging that this was an opportune moment to debate the ethical dimensions of the tragedy unfolding in the Middle East, and proposing that we collectively consider the request made by Palestinian civil society not to treat their oppression as ordinary and tolerable (Bailey et al 2019).

In the weeks prior to publication, BPAS staff pressurized its members to withdraw their signatures from the letter. That's it: BPAS officials tried to persuade psychoanalysts to remain silent about a situation that for them raised profound moral and ethical questions.

This takes us to a curious place. On the one hand, it's exactly what one would expect; it's of a piece with the intensifying campaign to suppress the movement for Palestinian emancipation whatever the cost to civic freedoms. We see this echoed in the profession when the editorial boards of our journals block counter-hegemonic views from being published. A range of repressive behaviours have been detailed by Elizabeth Berger and Samah Jabr in their article 'Silencing Palestine: Limitations on Free Speech in Mental Health Organisations' (Berger and Jabr 2020). It's predictable, but at the same time, isn't it shocking? And wrong?

A few weeks after the New Associations letter appeared, the European Psychoanalytical Foundation issued a 'Statement of Non-Discrimination' (EPF 2019):

The European Psychoanalytical Federation respects the rights of members to individual expression.

It practices non-discrimination in its relations with members, groups of members of this Society and fellow IPA psychoanalytic societies as well as in national and international relations. The EPF does not endorse political views nor solicit the participation of members or societies in political controversy. (ibid)

The text is obscure, at least I can't make sense of it. But its purpose seems clear: to pre-empt any further attempt by its psychoanalyst members to discuss the subjugation of the Palestinian people. The EPF will not flinch in its determination to avoid reviewing its institutional links to systemic racism!

My final example illustrates how anti-Palestinian racism reaches out from Israeli health services to envelop clinicians from abroad. Hadassah Hospital in Jerusalem promotes its child mental health services with vignettes featuring the stories of two children. This is the story of Rachel:

Rachel is a 10 year-old girl who recently made aliyah with her parents, Ilana and Yossi. They were walking along Herzl Boulevard, when a car driving at high speed mounted the curb and smashed into a group of people standing at a bus stop. ...

Her mother said: “Rachel felt powerless and was traumatised as a result of witnessing a terror attack. The Jerusalem Crisis Centre helped bring our girl back to us.” Ilana, Rachel’s mother.

Rachel is one of more than 2,000 victims of terror who have been treated at the [crisis centre] over the last 10 years. ...¹⁷

Hadassah also has a service for treating Palestinian children, named after Rozana. Again, I quote:

Maysa and Rozana – a mother’s love literally crossed borders.

*In 2012, four-year-old Rozana Salawhi sustained life-threatening injuries when she fell from the ninth floor of the family’s apartment near Ramallah. If not for the quick thinking of her mother, Maysa Abu Ghannam, Rozana would have died. Maysa **refused** to send her daughter to the local Palestinian hospital. She wanted her treated at Hadassah Hospital in Jerusalem. She arranged with the Palestinian and Israeli ambulance services to transfer Rozana at the checkpoint, despite precious minutes lost for the handover.¹⁸*

What’s revealed in these juxtaposed examples?

An Israeli child is the victim of ‘terror’. This has no context or meaning. The perpetrator’s motives are not of interest, and we are left to imagine a random, hateful – a savage – attack on a defenceless and innocent Jewish Israeli victim. Meanwhile, a Palestinian child’s life is endangered by a self-inflicted negligence; her gutsy mother redeems herself by, it seems, simply asking to be allowed through the checkpoints to deliver her child into the arms of her rescuers at Hadassah. Both stories reinforce the myth of a benevolent Israel victimized by crazed and uncivilized Palestinians, a myth that enables the murderous extension of Israeli power.

Mayza is presented as the heroine-exception, a modern-day Rashid Bey, the decent native who beseeches Israel’s support: she trusts only Israelis with her child.¹⁹ The apparent ease with which she negotiates her way through the ‘border’ – which is actually not a border but an apartheid structure, controlling the movement of Palestinians but not of Jewish Israelis living in the West Bank – suggests that a humane and flexible neighbourliness characterises the military administration, and that it is only Palestinian rejectionism that prevents the two communities from reconciling.

This is deceptive on so many levels. The ever-tightening control of movement has become a ghastly intrusion into the everyday lives of most Palestinians in the occupied

¹⁷ <https://www.hadassahaustralia.org/jerusalem-crisis-intervention-center>

¹⁸ This passage has disappeared from the Hadassah website. It was reproduced on page 7 of the newsletter of the lobby group ‘Friends of Israel’, at <https://www.foiwa.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2019/09/FOIWA-News-Winter-2019-low-res.pdf>. Accessed 9/10/2020

¹⁹ The only Palestinian to appear in *Altneuland*, Herzl’s fictional vision of a future Jewish State. Bey has come to be grateful to the new regime...

Palestinian territories. To cite one relevant statistic, in one seven-year period, delays at the checkpoints resulted in 35 infant and 5 maternal deaths (Shoaibi 2011). The checkpoints inhibit free movement, but are also used to humiliate and demean. The lives of children like Rozana are routinely destroyed by the colonizing power, here portrayed as their saviour.

While purporting ‘to benefit the Palestinian community’, Hadassah promotes a cynical inversion of political and social context, and a brazen example of institutional racism, perpetuating myths that shroud a determination to extirpate Mayza’s community from the land.

Is it too much to ask that Western professionals see through this?

Yet, there are international experts and academic and clinical institutions willing to participate in a conference that Hadassah is to hold in Israel in 2021 on the very subject of trauma and mental health. The published draft Programme again de-contextualises and de-politicises the topic²⁰: participants will sit in the conference centre in Al Quds/Jerusalem, reflecting on the latest clinical findings and techniques, silent about the traumatizing strategies employed to ethnically cleanse the city around them.

As in the financial sphere, perhaps we could be careful to relate to organisational partners who share a demonstrated commitment to ideas and practices consistent with the ethos and therapeutic purposes of the mental health professions.

Conclusion: prospects for change

As this text is finalised for publication, we learn that in April 2021 Salman Akhtar is to give the keynote address at a conference on ‘The Good in Man’, hosted by the Tel Aviv Institute for Contemporary Psychoanalysis²¹. From the perspective of this paper, this is another unfortunate example of an esteemed colleague turning a blind eye to their moral responsibility to engage systemic racism rather than appease it.

It is doubly unfortunate, for Akhtar had in an earlier paper provided a clear argument for doing just the opposite. Oppressed peoples, he argued, ‘used as dehumanised targets of the majority’s projections’, can choose between regressive and progressive responses to their plight. They can ‘anesthetize their distress’ in social withdrawal, fundamentalism and, at times, ‘impotent ... acts of “terrorism”’; or they can ‘assert their rights’ to the point where ‘the majority realizes the benefits of collaboration’ (Akhtar 2014).

As examples of the former, we might think of the man cited above, who, overcome with frustration at the relentless humiliations inflicted by the Occupation, drives his car into pedestrians on a city street; or of a group in Gaza responding to the siege by blasting a dangerous but ineffectual lump of metal over the separation fence. Examples of collective acts of self-assertion, value-based, non-violent and with a clear liberatory objective, are to be found in the Great March of Return, and the boycott, divestment and sanctions campaign (BDS).

²⁰ See <https://www.traumaandmentalhealthconference.org/program-outline>

²¹ See http://www.taicp.org.il/?page_id=276&lang=en

If we fail to give our support to the latter, on what moral grounds can we censure the former? And if we do not support the application of responsible pressure on the regime enforcing such oppression, are we not personally reinforcing the wall of protection which our governments offer to the Israeli Government?

There are those who understand the logic of this argument, and are responding to Raja Shehadeh's hope that the international public would respond to the struggle for decolonisation and equal rights. The fault line, more philosophical than social, runs right through our profession. When the European Association of Behavioural and Cognitive Therapists held an international conference in Israel in 2014, the British chapter passed an AGM resolution condemning the move (BABCP 2014: 13). When the International Association of Relational Psychoanalysis and Psychotherapy (IARPP), did the same, fourteen hundred clinicians signed a petition asking that the decision be revoked²². The protests were initiated and joined by many IARPP's members: the association was deeply divided, not only in its overseas chapters, but within its Israeli branch also.

Protecting and acting in accordance with the dominant discourse in relation to Palestine/Israel is not an expression of neutrality, but of a neutered morality that directly endangers Palestinian lives. It should not be given a veneer of respectability.

The Netanyahu administration took advantage of the protection offered by the Trump Administration to greatly intensify the offensive against the Palestinians, with land being confiscated and homes, water resources, olive trees and other structures being destroyed at a higher rate than for some years (White 2020). Monthly, hundreds are being made homeless²³.

It is not possible to grasp the almost unimaginable human reality that has become a perverse normality for Palestinian people if we rely only on the 'liberal' press (such as the Guardian) and public media (such as the BBC) for information. Our associations need to fashion their own direct links with Palestinian society, above all in forging relationships of mutuality and respect with our Palestinian counterparts. We might look to the example of the Lancet Palestine Health Partnership as a model for promoting joint intersectional research and educating an international audience, while breaking the isolation, and countering the sense of abandonment, that many Palestinians experience (Kemp 2020b). We need to recognise the right to resist oppression, both as a right and as *a requirement for psychological well-being and dignity*.

Unlike our Palestinian colleagues, we have agency, as individual citizens and as members of professional associations. We can follow the example of others who *are* speaking up: academic and religious organisations and trade unions debate this issue and give practical expression to *their* values. All Palestinians have asked of us is that we refrain from aiding and abetting their oppression, and that we forego the privileges that flow from it.²⁴

²² See https://secure.everyaction.com/hIICm7s106Wu9RFAS0D_A2

²³ See the regular reports produced by the Israeli Committee Against House Demolitions at <https://icahd.org/>

²⁴ See BDS (2005) 'Palestinian Civil Society Call for BDS' at <https://bdsmovement.net/call>

In an attempt to respect this simple and reasonable request a number of British-based colleagues formed the UK-Palestine Mental Health Network in 2014. We now work with partners in the USA, Ireland, South Africa, France and Palestine itself. The Networks act on the basis that mental health organisations, along with others, have a part to play in maintaining and enhancing ethical standards in society, and a specific responsibility to address the cause of peace and justice in Palestine/Israel. Those wishing to do so can add their name to a ‘Mental Health Workers’ Pledge for Palestine’²⁵. An initiative requesting that colleagues reflect on their responsibility to, at the very least, follow their primary professional duty to ‘do no harm’ will be launched soon.

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²⁵ See <https://ukpalmhn.com/pledge/>

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