Psychoanalysis & The Public Sphere:
Social Fault Lines

19-20 and 26-27 September 2020

Abstracts

Lena Auestad, *Fascist Hate Speech and Group Identification*
In fascist hate speech, I argue, the speakers aim to put unwanted qualities of themselves onto others, to force the recipients into an inferior social place or category. The speakers repeat traditional statements of humiliation, to land the recipients with fear, shame, guilt. These insults neither seek to inform, nor to invite responsive discourse, though they can be directed towards a third, inviting the third to join in the attack. They rely on an underlying group identification with an idealised "we" against a "them". On a social level, a proliferation of hate speech results in empathy being replaced by intergroup contempt as a dominant response to others and to increased acceptance for discrimination, thus weakening the social fabric.

Peter Barham, *Caught in The Trip Wires of Capitalist Modernity*
I shall highlight the struggles with social fault lines that people with psychosis in Western societies frequently endure. Historically, market values have established the benchmark by which mad lives are judged. Drawing on Black radical thought, I shall say that the marginalization of black *and* mad lives is constitutional –part of the fabric- of Western democracy. Anthropologists have recently drawn on the concept of 'social defeat' (originating in animal studies) to describe the demoralization of mad lives in Western societies. Instancing people I have worked with, I shall say that whilst these concepts throw light on experiences of social suffering they are too *defeatist*. I shall reflect briefly on how psychoanalytic thought can help in providing resources for hope.

David Black, *A "Wake-up Call" to What*?
If, as people say, the Covid crisis is a "wake-up call", what is it waking us up to? In a somewhat psychoanalytic way, I suggest that it's one of many symptoms, which will not be properly tackled until they are seen collectively in a deeper psychological and philosophical perspective. In particular, I suggest that a constellation of factors in the 19th century – the triumphs of western science, the omnipotence of European imperialism, and the myth of progress – implanted a system of seductive but false values whose costs we are increasingly having to recognise. With cautious optimism, I suggest that recent developments in psychoanalysis and elsewhere may offer a glimpse of possible solutions.

Stephen Eric Bronner, *Bigotry and the Struggle Against Modernity*
I speak about the ideology of Aryan superiority with reference to "white nationalism" today. The basic argument is that such racism never exists by itself, but is rather one part of a more general assault on enlightenment political values and the centralizing aspects of the capitalist accumulation process. Aryan superiority no less than white nationalism mark the worldview of "losers" or, better, those who consider themselves "losers" in this process. My claim is that their position in the capitalist accumulation process confirms their fears and that an "elective affinity" (Max Weber) exists between pre-modern classes, or sectors, which is why the class base of fascist movements is always the same. It will thus become evident that more is involved than fear of diversity or the simple loss of privilege and that the scapegoat chosen is purely a matter of political and historical exigency. Constituting the image of the scapegoat is some mixture of paranoia, projection, and what I've called "conspiracy fetishism." That is why the scapegoat's real life is completely irrelevant to the bigot's image of him or her. The crucial moment of ideological politics thus becomes selling the public on what it would rationally know isn't true. Ernst Bloch once told the story of a friend who became a Nazi and, after being asked why, the fellow responded that "one does not die for a politics that one understands but for a politics that one loves." Thus, the "the ratio of the irratio" — and the need to understand it.

Coline Covington, *Leadership in a Time of Fear*
My presentation looks at the successes and failures of how leaders and governments have managed the virus and how large groups of people, overwhelmed by anxiety, can make self-destructive decisions based on mass fear. I point out how populist leaders foment mass fear for their own political ends and how more skillful leaders have managed the fear and panic of the crisis.

Karl Figlio, *Ambivalence and a Fault in Democracy*
Ambivalence was an abiding concern for Freud. It refers to the contrary currents of love and hate directed simultaneously at the same object. Ambivalence makes no sense in the rational language of consciousness, but is an imminent, elusive moment in the individual. We may catch it, but it vanishes as soon as we try to articulate it. This paper is based on the ramifications of 'primary ambivalence', a level beneath love and hate, at the origin of the ego. For Freud, the ego emerges by creating an object from annulling an internal unpleasure, simultaneously eliminating and retaining it. The polarity is not between love and hate, but between self and other, existence and non-existence. The 52%/48% Brexit vote should be seen, not just as a defeat, but as tapping into primary ambivalence.

Ambivalence is expressed through division into its antithetical currents. In the individual, it takes the form of guilt or disavowal; in society, a consolidation into a structure, in which individuals are relieved by joining a group based on identification, polarized in opposition to another group-by-identification. Dissent offers a psychic haven from the turmoil of ambivalence and is, therefore, favoured over tolerating a threat to identity in working persistently for consent. Ambivalence poses a problem for democracy because democracy rests on the idea that individuals can come together by consent. Yet, as Freud pointed out with his concept of the 'narcissism of small differences', the more opposition diminishes, the more groups mirror each other; and the loss of a separate object undermines their security in a separate existence. As the group fragments, each individual faces the ambivalence that had been divided into separate currents. Intolerance of ambivalence drives renewed opposition.

Populist leaders feed on this anxiety. They create an atmosphere of scepticism towards evidence and nudge the population to suspect the motives of experts, who model the aspiration to know truth better. They discourage a belief in accommodation around rationality and reality, and lure society into a haven built on prejudice and delusion.

But I think the *unconscious* strategy is different. It is to bind morale to the leader. The leader carries the group ego-ideal and induces a grandiosity in the group through identification with that ideal, forming a group ideal-ego. As Freud pointed out, the morale of a group does not falter in the face of external threat, but disintegrates when the internal bonds of identification break down.

Recasting the source of group strength allows us to examine a persistent conundrum in social analysis. A 51%/48% voting result is both rational and meaningless. Leave aside all other deficiencies: in the Unconscious, it intensifies the bonds of identification within groups and with the leader. It is akin to Hannah Arendt's analysis of totalitarianism.

The democratic impulse runs counter to this form of social cohesion. It needs a civil society. Unconsciously, civil society must assuage the intolerance of ambivalence. There must be space in which the enthusiasm of the ideal-ego can be mitigated and nationalist idealization can be dissipated. It must include self-awareness in conscious negotiation. My language is psychoanalytic, but it finds a partner in Jürgen Habermas' ideas of 'constitutional patriotism', instead of nationalist or ideological patriotism, and 'deliberative democracy', in which civil society is a sector of equal weight to the market and the state.

R. D. Hinshelwood, *The Disappointment of Democracy*
Democracy presupposes rational decision-making. Reasoning is, manifestly, not a universal faculty. Human beings are emotional animals as much as wise humans. In many situations, and politics is one of them, emotionalism can appear in only one or another segment of a group or society. The us-and-them group dynamic serves to separate out the immiscible mixture of emotions and reason. One of the problems with democracy is that it involves a losing side, a side defeated and disappointed. Sometimes those defeated are the highly intellectual reasonable segment, who are then confronted by both their expectation of reasonableness and their emotional unhappiness at the same time. What then happens to their emotionalism?

Paul Hogget, *Liberty or Death (placard seen on an anti-lockdown protest in Washington in April)*
Economic and cultural libertarians are facilitating climatic and ecological destruction on our Earth. What insights, from psychoanalysis and elsewhere, can we use to understand this malignant social force?

Rye Dag Holmboe, *The Bear Man*
I'll examine the artist Mark Wallinger, who installed a work at the Freud Museum called *Self-Reflection*. My paper will focus on a different work, a performance called *Sleeper*, in which the artist spent ten nights alone dressed up in a bear suit in Berlin's Neue Nationalgalerie. I suppose the performance now looks like an extreme form of self-isolation, but the work does also speak to the conference's central concerns. That at least will be my argument.

Martin Kemp, *The Psychoanalytic Encounter with Settler Colonialism in Palestine/Israel*
The paper explores the relationship between the legacy of Western imperialism and the complicity of the "international community" in the settler colonial project taking place in Palestine/Israel. It analyzes some key aspects of Western discourse that inhibit an appreciation of non-Zionist perspectives, and which obstruct action to challenge the systemic human rights abuses to which Palestinians are subject. It argues that psychoanalysis, as a discipline and a profession, participates in a wider societal failure, adapting itself to priorities that conflict with its ostensible ethical foundations. Recent years have seen a strengthening of the worldwide movement in support of Palestinian rights in general, and the growth of activism within the mental health community in particular. The exchanges between activists and mainstream professional organizations are here interrogated to identify key points of contention. The paper considers the impact of the settler colonial enterprise on Israeli society as a whole, and on the politics of Israeli psychoanalysis, to support the argument that neutrality is not an option for the international mental health community. It concludes that principled engagement initiatives are necessary to meet mental health workers' professional responsibilities to do no harm, and to contribute to the future health of the relationship between Palestinian and Jewish Israeli societies.

Les Levidow, *Paranoiac Zionist Racism: How Israel's Settler-Colonial Violence is Displaced and Disavowed.*
Like other colonial-settler regimes, the Zionist one has subordinated, dispossessed and expelled the indigenous people, while projecting its own violence onto them. Moreover, this racist paranoiac projection has been internalised and promoted by the British elite.   Various state practices have constructed a homogenous 'Jewish community' of pro-Israel model citizens who thereby become victims of pro-Palestine antisemitism.   In the public sphere, this institutionalised philo-semitism helps to disavow and displace Israel's colonial-settler violence, while shielding the UK-Israel partnership from criticism.

When the Labour Party briefly deviated from its century-long pro-Zionist legacy, the elite consensus demonised the new leadership for accepting 'rampant antisemitism' among its membership. The smear campaign gave a near-monopoly voice to mainstream pro-Israel Jewish organisations, while ignoring or silencing the many Jewish pro-Palestine voices.   The campaign portrayed the Labour Party leadership as 'an existential threat to Jewish life', thus reinforcing the paranoid projection of Israeli settler-colonialism.

Susie Orbach, *The Lost Notion of We?*
Trump's backers in the hotel business are screeching for bailouts. The UK Furlough system is ending. Social inequities are rising, and our health service is under extreme pressure. The Fall-Out is everywhere although unequally. Where Covid initially put us all in a shared boat, real divisions and those that are purposefully sewn, make societal wide solutions problematic. We have lost the notion of a 'we', and without that, transformations will be sectional and inevitably favour elites. Psychoanalytic thinking needs to join with progressive economic thinking to offer new transformative stories.

Ian Parker, *Why The Clinic is Politics*
The clinical work we do is political, the clinical is political, but that simple statement is dangerously multivalent, with consequences that take us in diverse contradictory directions,

clinically and politically. The forces pitted against psychoanalysis by shifting configurations of commonsense, by the ideological infrastructure of capitalist and late capitalist society, are immense. That is why we need political analyses of the place and role of the clinic, to treat the clinic as a form of politics as a problem as well as an arena of struggle, as an arena where we struggle against the very form that enables our work to take place.

Barry Richards, *The Basic Fault in Democracy*
Governments of any sort evoke ambivalence in their citizens, because government stands *in loco parentis* and therefore must inherit some of the ambivalence universally inherent in feelings towards parent figures, who protect and restrict us. Or to put it another way, government is the institutional embodiment of others, whose needs and wishes must compete with our own. It represents the society of others, on which we depend and yet which for its very existence is a permanent object of our narcissistic rage.

So the pains of ambivalence are at the heart of the political realm, as of personal life. Politically, there are two basic ways in which citizens can try to escape the painful ambivalence towards government. There is the libertarian way (whether neo-liberal or leftist) for which government of any type is fundamentally a bad object to be countered or evaded at every turn. And there is the authoritarian way, for which government, as embodied in a particular form, typically a particular leader, is an ideal object, to be loved and obeyed: in short, to be merged with. These opposites share a common source, which is the inability to be governed by any agency outside the narcissistic self.

The deep connection between libertarian and authoritarian outlooks is manifest in Trumpism and other populisms. Liberal democracy, however, demands something else of us its citizens. It requires that we tolerate ambivalence, such that we can welcome government while also standing independent of it. It is a demand that could only be made of the modern individual, the self as agent. Yet as Erich Fromm described nearly eighty years ago[1], we modern individuals are hesitant to inhabit that agency. We fear the aloneness that freedom from traditional authority can bring. Yet we also fear being dominated and engulfed by the state/society of others.

Democratic constitutions do not address this basic fault in democracy, this lack of fit between the core psychic complex and the model of the ideal citizen, who must retain independent judgment while accepting interdependence. Since WW2 it seems we have pivoted from authoritarian ways of trying to cancel the ambivalence to libertarian ones, driven along that path by consumer culture (at first a leading edge of conformity, now the forcing house of expressive individualism). Brexit is in part one example of this trend. More generally, political settlements in European democracies which could possibly offer more integrative experience have been broken up in the polarised politics of the C21.

In an era of predominantly libertarian trends in the avoidance of ambivalence, democratic governance will be weakened by antipathy towards government. One symptom of this democratic malaise is the low levels of trust in governments (and in other institutional representatives of the superego). This paper will examine survey data[2] on variations in trust

levels across time and between European countries, in order to indicate some of the conditions most conducive to maximising tolerance of political ambivalence.

Joanna Ryan, *Psychoanalysis, Inequalities and Social Justice*
Psychoanalysis itself is already in the public sphere , however much this is sidelined, split off, or unrecognised, for both methodological and ideological reasons. Any project of applying psychoanalysis to the public sphere needs to take this into account. This is especially so in the case of class, where psychoanalysis is typified by a striking absence of any discussion of class matters, including within the therapy relationship. Psychoanalysis in its social existence embodies and requires for access to it and its trainings, significant amounts of economic, cultural, educational and symbolic capital. However within aspects of psychoanalysis there have been and are many attempts to remedy this discriminatory and exclusionary state of affairs, mainly through low cost and free provision, and variously through the NHS . I will address what we can learn from some of these attempts, towards a more class inclusive psychoanalysis, a task made even more urgent in the widespread mental distress arising from present circumstances where it is the poorest and least advantaged who suffer most.

Lynne Segal, *Repairing Care*
The current crisis has simultaneously shown just how crucial care is for our lives and quite how uncaring our society has become. But as we argue in *The Care Manifesto*, it's important to emphasise that care is not *only* the 'hands-on' care of directly looking after the physical and emotional needs of others. It's also about recognizing our interdependence, throughout life as well as our ever-greater global interdependence, along with our shared vulnerability. We can only really flourish in a flourishing world. So, we need to sketch out what a world organised around care would look like, rejecting so much we have seen in recent times, when circles of care have shrunk to the ever-narrower level of the individual or the nuclear family. Caring for and caring about others, near and far, helps us to appreciate our shared and fragile humanity, and also to acknowledge rather than disavow our own fears and dependencies. Talk of care is everywhere today: we have clapped for carers, seen the word emblazoned on politicans' lapel pins, noted corporations assuring us how much they care; indeed, 'care' is the very latest Facebook emoji. But to bring it down to earth – to be able to care more – we must first fully recognise our interdependence and then set about repairing our broken and neglected model of care at every level, including putting care at the centre of our relationship to the natural world.

Philip Stokoe, *Value or Control: managing radical uncertainty.*
I draw on a psychoanalytic view of the difference between a fundamentalist state of mind and one that can face reality and manage complexity. I link this to the difference between the finite and the infinite game. Whatever else this pandemic has done, it has opened a dangerous slide into a totalitarian state of mind.

Other abstracts to be confirmed. Please see programme for all speakers and titles.